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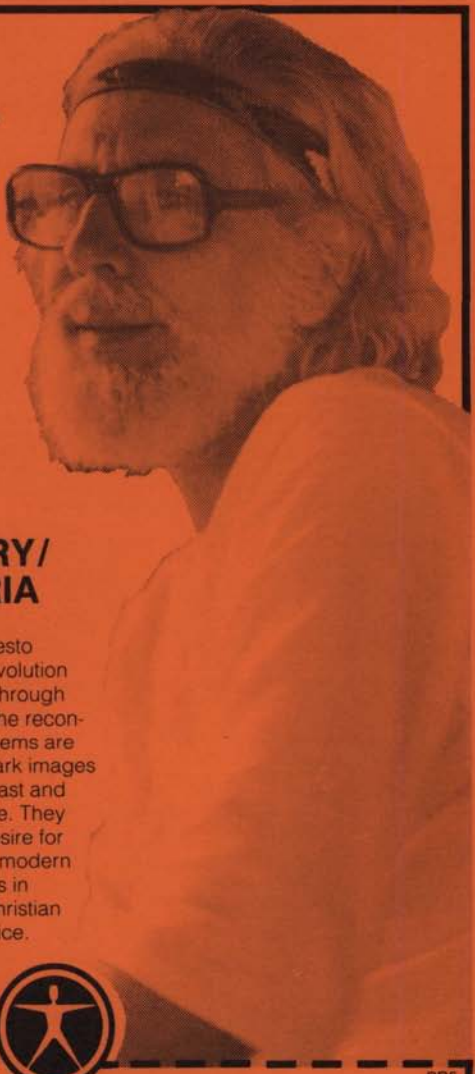

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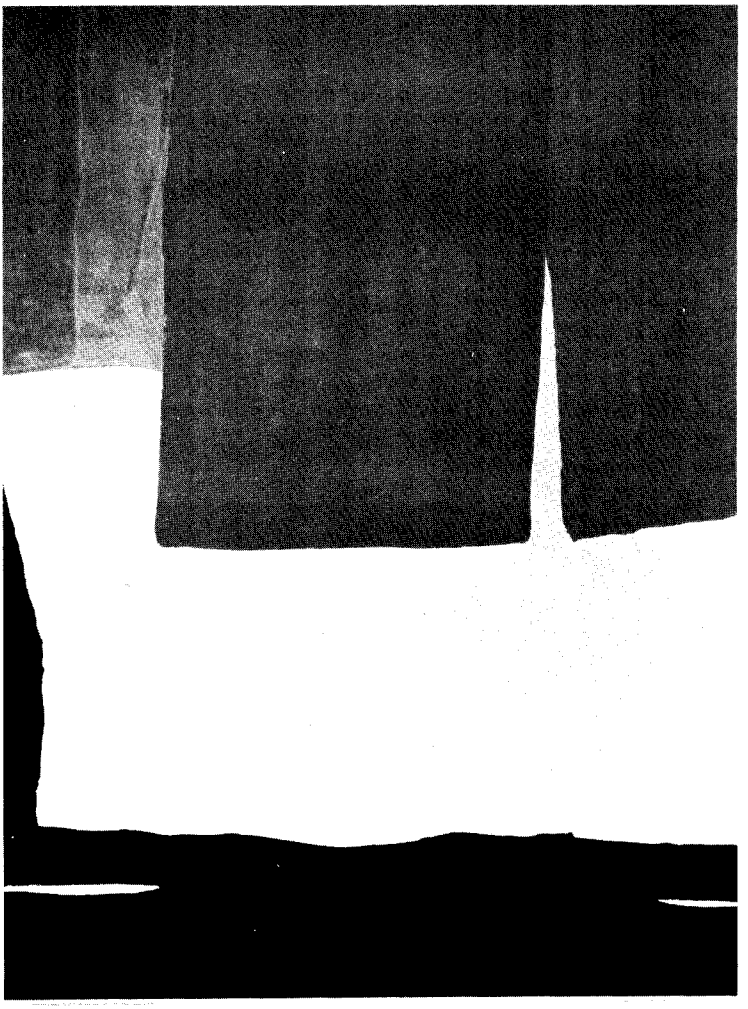

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Peter L. Berger

WESTERN INDIVIDUALITY: LIBERATION AND LONELINESS

On the threshold of the modern age we come upon a solitary figure embarked on a strange journey. It is Don Quixote, riding across the bleak and barren landscape of Castile (a monotheistic landscape, evoking other wildernesses in which strange voices spoke to other solitary men). Literary scholars may go on arguing whether Don Quixote was the last medieval man or the first modern one; we are entitled to see him in this double identity and as a prototype of Western individuality. In his subjective norms and motives, of course, Quixote represented a medieval world that was fast becoming implausible. But he also foreshadowed all those other solitary figures who brought about the world of modernity—most of them "knights of sad countenance," *conquistadores* of realms in space and mind, explorers and inventors—and all of them quite mad in the eyes of their contemporaries (and few lucky enough to have a Sancho Panza trotting alongside). But to say that Quixote is mad is to look at him from outside the Quixotic universe. Within that universe, of course, his projects are not mad at all. Rather, they are necessary acts of obedience to a voice that speaks to him alone (as the *daimon* spoke to Socrates and as conscience spoke to Luther). To himself, Quixote is not mad (though he may occasionally wonder whether he may be—did Socrates ever doubt his *daimon*, as Luther did when he asked himself, "Little monk, who are you, who questions the word of Pope and Emperor?"). Yet we know that Quixote is sad. His sadness is the fruit of his condition: he is terribly free and terribly lonely. And it is precisely this indivisible conjunction of liberation and loneliness that makes Quixote a prototype of Western humanity.

In looking at history, it is as misleading to exaggerate as to minimize the distinctiveness of specific cultures or ages. At its core, all humanity is one, and the West has produced but a variant of the universal phenomenon (an extragalactic observer may see this as a barely noticeable wrinkle). Freedom, as a quality attributable to men in one place, must be attributable to all men in all places, at least potentially, if the attribution is made as a statement about human nature. Loneliness, curiosity and innovativeness are likewise to be found throughout the whole spectrum of human cultures (we may

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assume that it was a solitary and curious individual who first made fire). On the other hand, it is misleading to overlook the strategic differences accounting for the diversity of paths that human beings cut through history. To do so is to make history a grey area. The very fact that we can intelligibly speak of "Western civilization" implies that this particular aggregation of human acts and meanings differs in significant ways from other aggregations, such as, say, those of southern and eastern Asia. In this "Western aggregate," we would contend that there is a strategically central item—*the autonomous individual*, both as an idea and as a reality of human experience. This phenomenon precedes modernity; indeed it has roots in very early developments of Western culture, and it underwent a radical change with the advent of the modern age. In fact, it is arguable that this very change was an important element in the genesis of what we now know as the modern world. If so, it is not a truism to point out that the modern world originated in Europe—*not* in India, *not* in China, nor anywhere else in the vast array of human cultures.

All human beings have selves, and insofar as they are reflective, they ask questions about the nature of this self. The West has no privileged status with regard to either the intensity or the depth of these questions. To take only one non-Western case, it could be argued that questions about the nature, boundaries, and destiny of the self constitute the core of several millenia of Indian thought, all the way back to the more speculative portions of the Rig-Veda. Nevertheless, the autonomous individual, in the Western sense, is a very peculiar variant of that human self, which we may stipulate as a cross-cultural universal. Jan Romein, the Dutch historian, has coined the phrase "common human pattern" to denote a set of cross-cultural uniformities, which are not universal but very widely distributed. His purpose was to underline the peculiar character of modern Western culture. In Romein's sense, Western individuality deviates sharply from the "common human pattern." And it is deviant precisely in its features of liberation and loneliness—the individual as free in and of himself, as differentiated from any and all collective allegiances, and for that very reason alone, thrown upon himself, "alienated." It is important to understand that the distinctiveness of this phenomenon has been perceived both by those who glorified it and by others who deplored it. This same feature of Western civilization strikes non-Westerners, over and over again, when they first come in contact with the West. Whether repelled or attracted, most Asians or Africans, upon their first visit to a Western country

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(aside from the obvious impressions of the material structures of life resulting from advanced technology), will be impressed by Western "individualism"—perceived in sharp contrast to the collective or corporate patterns "back home."

This difference has come out very clearly in questions of human rights. It may safely be asserted that every society has *some* notion of the rights of the individual, of what may or may not be done to him, or of what belongs or does not belong to him. In that very broad sense, the Roman adage of *suum cuique* has universal credence. But just where are the boundaries of this *suum* as against the demands and indeed the rights of the community to which the individual belongs? The modern philosophical and legal tradition of human rights derives from Europe. Through an accident of history, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promulgated by the United Nations, which today is given lip service by virtually all states, is couched in the concepts and terminology of this Western tradition. But it often becomes evident in discussion with non-Westerners that they interpret individual rights in a much less "individualistic" context. They are likely to modify the Western notions of individual rights by reference to the "collective dimension" of these rights or by ascribing equally valid rights to various corporate entities (ranging from the family, through tribe, caste or community, all the way to the state). This situation is further complicated by the fact that the Western tradition of human rights, with its roots in a specifically Western philosophical anthropology, has been and continues to be criticized as "excessive individualism" from within Western culture. Today the most visible version of this criticism is Marxism, with its insistence on the collective nature of man. But Marxism is by no means the only form of Western self-criticism. There continue to be collectivisms of the right as well as of the left, and collectivisms with no clear political orientation (i.e., the so-called counterculture). And just as there are "converts" to Western individualism in Asia, so are there adherents of Asian collectivisms in the West. In consequence, the argument over the distinctive features of Western individuality today is carried on both within and between cultures.

Inevitably, to explain Western individuality is a monumental undertaking, especially if we include an inquiry into its various historical roots. Although we cannot do this here, we must define the phenomenon to be investigated: what do we mean when we speak of "the autonomous individual?" In this connection, we must keep in mind that we are *not* just speaking of "an idea." To be sure, there is

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an idea of individual autonomy in the roots of Western civilization—an idea that has had very powerful empirical consequences. Following Georges Sorel's use of that term, we may say that this idea has been one of the most powerful "myths" of modern Western history, a vision inspiring revolutions in every area of social life. Of course this development can be studied by the historian of ideas. But, insofar as ideas have empirical consequences, they cannot be studied as ideas only. It is not just that some people (philosophers, poets, legal theorists) have *thought of* the individual as being autonomous; much larger numbers of people have *experienced* themselves and others as autonomous individuals. This experience has been embodied in a variety of *institutions*, which in turn are experienced as having an objective reality outside the mind of the individual. Thus the autonomous individual experiencing both psychological and social *realities* is much more than "an idea" (though he is that too). Put simply, the individual may forget or set aside an idea in his mind; he cannot do this with a structure of his own self-experience, let alone an institutional structure of his society.

Here, then, are some propositions that begin to delineate both the idea and the experience to which the phrase "the autonomous individual" refers. These propositions are stated from the vantage point of the individual:

(1) *I am unique, over and beyond any traits I have in common with others, even those others to whom I belong most fully.* This proposition, presumably, expresses the root experience of autonomous individuality, and affirms it in the face of, and if necessary *against*, every conceivable collective identification. It is both an ontological and an ethical proposition. Ontologically, it affirms that the uniqueness of the individual is his essential reality. Ethically, it implies that this uniqueness ought to be recognized by all others; as such, it is the root assumption of every (Western) assertion of the rights of the individual as against his community.

(2) *I have within myself the capacity to act in such a way that my actions are determined by myself and by myself alone.* Or more simply: *I have within myself the capacity to be free.* This, if you will, is the Hellenic proposition *par excellence.* Again, it has both an ontological and an ethical aspect: I assert my freedom as a reality of my being; at the same time, I assert the moral right to express this reality in action. (Historically, of course, it was much later that there came the corollary assertion that my own claim to freedom must necessarily be universalized: If I claim freedom for myself, I must concede the same freedom to all men.)

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(3) *I am responsible for my own actions; I am not responsible for the actions of others; no one else is responsible for my actions.* This proposition is primarily ethical. It has both Hellenic and biblical roots; in both cases, it brought about a moral revolution. It liberates men from moral bondage both in the present (the collective responsibility of, say, one's tribe) and to the past (carrying along the moral accounts of one's ancestors).

(4) *What I am to myself within myself is what is most real to me, and only on the basis of this reality can I reconstruct the reality of the world in my mind.* This proposition, unlike the preceding ones, is more specifically modern. It is at the heart of what has been called "the turn to the subjective" in modern Western thought, from the Cartesian revolution in philosophy to the rise of the novel and the appearance of modern psychology. It is, above all, an epistemological proposition, but it has had vast consequences in the manner in which both self and world are experienced.

(5) *Whatever rights I may have as a member of my community, I also have rights that pertain to myself as a unique individual; if necessary, these rights have to be asserted against my own community.* Again, in its mature form this is mainly a modern proposition. It is at the heart of the democratic tradition—philosophically, politically, and legally. It is above all an assertion of the individual's right to dissent and not to conform, not only in thought (which, for example, the Stoics would have asserted) but in actions.

(6) *I have the capacity to choose my life, my world and finally my own self, and I assert the right to realize this capacity.* Once again, this proposition has different roots, but perhaps it could be called the American proposition *par excellence* (America being a special case of Western modernity). It refers to much more than what is colloquially known as "the self-made man" (though it refers to that too). It implies that the individual can, and perhaps ought to, decide how he should live, what he should believe in, and ultimately who he will be. In this, it represents the most radical, truly Promethean thrust of Western individuality.

* * *

These are tentative, preliminary formulations: they are neither final nor exclusive. They constitute pointers to an empirical phenomenon—no more, but also no less. The important result of this reflection is to begin putting concrete content into our intuition that Western individuality is distinctive. And every one of the above propositions (which, again, are to be understood as experiential as

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much as ideational) may be said *to excise* the individual from his collective background—to make him both freer and more alone. Indeed, the very vision of the individual here is, more and more, a solitary vision—the individual who is ultimately to be recognized and judged in his unique reality. This individual is, in Paul the Apostle's words, "neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female"—or, more precisely, while he (or she) is this or that, such identifications are accidents of birth and biography that do not touch on the *ens realissimum* of the unique individual "underlying" them all. Paul, to be sure, was speaking only of the unity of all Christians within the body of Christ. But it is not such a long way from this assertion to the modern one of the individual who has inalienable rights *qua* unique individual—"irrespective of race, color or creed"—to which a list of "accidents," such as national origin, sex (or, for that matter, "sexual orientation"), age, and physical or mental incapacity have been added. All of this comes to liberation, understood in ever fuller ways—and, in the very same movement, to a deepening aloneness.

If one argues that the above propositions delineate a specific Western phenomenon and *ipso facto* a deviation from the "common human pattern," one need not imply thereby that this phenomenon is absolutely without parallel elsewhere. Very few sociohistorical phenomena are that idiosyncratic. Diligent researchers will always be able to find a quasi-Socrates in ancient China or a quasi-Buddha in colonial New England. If nothing human is truly alien to me, then I must be open to the possibility that everything human can be found in very alien places. But here we are dealing with *aggregates*. Put differently, everything (or nearly everything) can be found everywhere, but in different aggregations. The distinctive character of Western individuality lies in the frequency and the centrality of these traits in the development of the West. This particular aggregate, we would argue, is indeed unique, and within the overall spectrum of human cultures it is sharply deviant.

Where does it come from? By the very nature of this sort of question, and given the vicissitudes of historical scholarship, there cannot be a conclusive answer. Still, we know where to look. The roots of the phenomenon lie in the eastern Mediterranean, in the discrete but finally conjoined experiences of ancient Greece and ancient Israel. Something must have happened, even if we cannot be certain what it was, which made some early Greek sculptors take their figures out of the background of the frieze and allow them to

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stand out by themselves, free and alone. And there is an inner line that leads from this artistic revolution to the figure of Socrates, obeying his inner voice even against the collective wisdom of the community. Reason usurped the rule of the fates, and in following the voice of reason, men (at first, very few men indeed) began to be autonomous in the literal sense of the Greek word—to live by one's own law. The same understanding of autonomy was at the core of Greek democracy (still limited to the few), and it inspired the Greeks in defending themselves against the might of the Persian empire. Marathon is an ever-recurring battle, as long as the idea of autonomy survives in human minds.

Nor can we know with any certainty just what happened, somewhere in the semidesert of the ancient Near East, as a straggling tribe of Semites discovered a strange divinity, who was not bound to them by blood and whose law (a divine autonomy this time, not the autonomy of human reason) severed the archaic links between man and the gods. Here too the fates were abolished, albeit in a very different way; Israel was forbidden all the consoling rituals by which its neighbors remained in communion with an all-embracing living cosmos. The Israelites were not much given to the graphic arts, so there are no solitary figures stepping out of friezes. Yet we can see a profound parallel to this symbolic liberation in the individual figures of the Hebrew Bible—who stood alone before God. Think of the dramatic encounter between King David and Nathan, the prophet of this God, and of Nathan's words in condemning David for the murder of Bathsheba's husband: "You are the man!" It is not a violation of the text to paraphrase: "You are *a* man." For what Nathan was saying, in total opposition to the entire religious and political culture of the ancient Near East, was that David, just like any other man, was fully responsible for his actions and could not escape his responsibility by draping himself in the magical mantle of kingship. Once again, in a context different from and yet strangely analogous to the Hellenic one, a solitary individual is presented to us in his freedom.

It is important to stress that, in bringing up the roots of Western individuality in these ancient soils, there is no implication that Socrates or David, or any of their contemporaries, were modern individuals. We must never project the present into the past, and much of the discipline of historical scholarship consists in resisting this ever-present temptation. In this particular case, compared with modern Westerners, the people in classical Athens or Biblical Jeru-

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salem were strong collectivists. Thus it is not easy for a modern person to grasp the corporate character of the Greek *polis* or of the Israelite conception of the Covenant. But it is the *roots* that we must look for. And the roots of individual autonomy, as we know it today, are quite clearly on those opposing shores of the eastern Mediterranean. The themes or motifs that began there took many centuries to work themselves out. In the course of this process, of course, they underwent countless transformations and permutations. It is also quite clear, we would contend, that the working-out process began in earnest when the Hellenic and Israelite traditions met in Christianity. It was the Christian synthesis that gave birth to Western civilization, and it was the Christian version of individual autonomy that is with us today, albeit very frequently in a secularized form.

Leave aside here the fascinating question of what happened to this phenomenon during the medieval period in Europe. Both the Hellenic and the Israelite elements of the Christian synthesis reemerged with particular power in the Renaissance and Reformation. It is these two revolutions that gave birth to the modern world. By the same token, they originated the specifically modern drama of liberation and loneliness, both on the levels of ideas and of human experience. Relentless conscience and relentless reason become the major agents of autonomization. If one wants prototypical figures for each theme, Luther and Machiavelli readily suggest themselves. On the level of ideas, there occurred what Arnold Gehlen has aptly called the "subjectivization" of modern man—in philosophy (beginning with Descartes's *cogito*), in morality and political thought (all those Enlightenment liberations of the mind), in the new sciences of man (beginning with Vico's *Scienza nuova*), and in the aesthetic and literary sensibilities of the modern West. These ideas, however, did not unfold in a Platonic heaven untouched by the mundane forces of economy and society. On the level of experience, these ideas continuously interacted with all the revolutions—technological, economic, political, and social—that have transformed the human condition over the last few centuries. And every one of these revolutions has been liberating and "alienating" at the same time.

In view of the Marxian derivation of the term "alienation," we must be clear, also, about what Marx *failed* to understand (this does not detract from Marx's status as one of the germinal thinkers of our age). Marx's translation of the originally Hegelian term from "idealism" to "materialism" remains a great intellectual achievement. It resulted in "alienation" becoming an essentially sociological con-

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cept, allowing us to explore it in concrete institutional contexts. Now, Marx's first misunderstanding was a sociohistorical one. He ascribed to *capitalism*, an important but partial component of modernity, what should be ascribed to *modernity as a whole.* He was quite right that capitalism has been "alienating"—thrusting man out of community into aloneness and thus leading him to experience the social world as a foreign reality. But in this "alienating" power capitalism is only *one case* of modernity—every other modern institution has the same power. This is notably so with modern technology, the modern city, and (most important of all, as Max Weber taught us) modern bureaucracy. This particular misunderstanding by Marx, of course, had very far-reaching historical consequences in the development of Marxism. It lies at the center of all the socialist utopias. It is a misunderstanding of vast and tragic scope. However, there is an even more fundamental misunderstanding in Marx's use of the concept of "alienation," on the level of philosophical anthropology: Marx failed to understand that "alienation" and freedom are reverse sides of the same coin. There can be no liberation without the cost of "alienation." This point cannot be developed here. (Arnold Gehlen did so in his essay, "Ueber die Geburt der Freiheit aus der Entfremdung," first published in 1952.) But, I cannot be considered free as long as I remain bound to the collective structures of my community (the "frieze," if you will), because my actions in this condition are governed throughout by the accident of my birth; indeed, this accident has become my fate. Conversely, I cannot be liberated from this collective bondage without paying a very high price of loneliness, because (and here Marx was essentially correct) man is a social being and it is very difficult (perhaps *biologically* difficult) for him to stand alone against his community. This second Marxian misunderstanding is even more decisive than the first one: the confusion of capitalist "alienation" with the more comprehensive "alienation" of modernity explains why socialist utopias continue to fail empirically; the failure to grasp the intrinsic connection between "alienation" and freedom indicates why these utopias are contradictory even on the level of the imagination.

* * *

We perceive a series of distinctive figures of modern Western individuality, emerging sharply at the beginning of the age conventionally called "modern," one figure following the preceding one and bringing out yet another facet of the phenomenon: the explorer, be it

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in space or in the mind, *conquistador* of unknown lands, Vasco da Gama or Descartes, always embodying the twin Quixotic motifs of freedom and aloneness; and, somewhat later, a much more prosaic figure, but no less potent in its historical consequences and exhibiting yet another facet of the same motifs—the entrepreneur, *conquistador* of the marketplace. Closely associated with the entrepreneur there appears the citizen, embodiment above all of the motif of freedom—bearer of rights (*les droits de l'homme et du citoyen*), maker of revolution. Entrepreneur and citizen, sometimes together and sometimes separately, are agents of the two most powerful transformations of the modern era—the "creative destruction" of capitalism and the French Revolution that has never ended. Then a figure that represents, as it were, a civilizing modification of both entrepreneur and citizen, the *bourgeois gentilhomme*, appears, the new ideal of familial and civic virtue, expressed most clearly within the bourgeois family with its nuanced balances of freedom and responsibility, individuation and community. Another figure follows, beginning with the nineteenth century—the "artist-hero" who defies bourgeois society, but in doing so seeks to realize a wilder and supposedly fuller freedom. Perhaps one should add to this list the existential hero, whose rebellion is even more complete than the bohemian's and is graphically described in some of the formulas of existential philosophy: *der Einzelne*, the one who "leaps" into faith, the totally solitary individual who experiences himself as "thrown" into the world and "condemned to freedom." At least on the level of ideas, one may say that existentialism represents the most radical formulation of the twin themes of liberation and loneliness.

We look at these figures, and three questions about them inevitably arise. The first is about historical origins and development: where do they come from, and why did they develop as they did? As we have pointed out above, this question cannot be tackled in terms of the history of ideas only; it must also be approached in terms of the general history within which ideas arise, become plausible and are institutionalized. This leads naturally (and to some extent overlappingly) to the second question: what are the social contexts in which such figures can plausibly exist? Or, more sharply defined: *what is the institutional matrix of individual autonomy?* This, of course, is the question that will most preoccupy social scientists. And thirdly, there is the question of truth: do these figures represent important and valid insights into the human condition, or are they pathological aberrations? Any attempt to answer this last question will have to

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relate the historical and social-psychological configurations to the timeless questions about the nature of man, that is, to the enterprise of philosophical anthropology.

The social scientist, trying to tackle the second question, thus operates in territory also claimed by the historian and the philosopher. While he cannot become a historian or a philosopher, he must do his own work in an ongoing dialogue with history and philosophy if it is not to become very shallow. From the beginning of such an undertaking, the social scientist is confronted by a great paradox: *individual autonomy, at its core, is a liberation from social constraints; at the same time, individual autonomy is a social construction.* In other words, *the paradox is that freedom is socially determined.* Needless to say, this paradox raises some very vexing philosophical problems. But let us describe the paradox in terms relevant to the individual—any ordinary individual: I experience myself as free, and I aspire to the realization of this freedom in my life. Yet I know that this experience did not come to me *ex nihilo* (not unless I am a Socrates). Rather, it was mediated to me by others, who not only told me about it, but who lived out the experience before my eyes. I *learned* freedom from others; I was *socialized into* a set of values and a sense of self built on the experience of freedom. To that extent, whatever may have been moments of ecstasy and decision (of "leaping") in my own biography, my experience of freedom is also dependent on the accident of my birth. Let it be assumed that, by their nature, all men are capable of freedom, perhaps even, in the depths of their being, *are* free. But they differ in their chances of realizing this freedom in actual living, and this difference once again depends heavily on the accident of birth. Leave aside the genetic and biological implications of this dependence—or, if you will, of my wisdom in choosing my parents (my chances of realizing freedom depend to a considerable degree on my intelligence, my physical stamina, my having escaped or not escaped crippling disease, etc.). The social dimensions of the dependence are formidable in themselves. Thus I can realize my freedom more readily if I live in one country rather than another, belong to one class rather than another, and so on. Put differently: *There is a social map of freedom.* An important social-scientific enterprise is filling out this map with some empirically useful coordinates (so that I know where my location is, and perhaps also that I may have hints on how to change it, if that is what I want).

All the figures that have just paraded before us can, at least in principle, be located on such a social map. Only at certain locations

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do individuals have a reasonable chance of *becoming* these figures. Vasco da Gama, born into an isolated Neolithic tribe, might have dreamed of going to see what lay behind the mountain that marked the tribal boundary, but probably no one would have known about the dream and, most important, *he would not have gone.* The entrepreneur in a society that proscribes enterprise becomes, say, a crafty priest or a manipulative bureaucrat; the revolutionary in a situation that does not allow any openings to political change becomes, say, an inventive interior decorator or a sex maniac; and so on. This general insight must now be specified in terms of economic, political, and cultural institutions. That is, there is an institutional matrix of individual autonomy, comprising at least institutions in these three areas of human society. As we have indicated already (and as has recently been spelled out in some detail by Daniel Bell and Michael Novak), crucial components of this matrix are capitalism, democracy, and what has often been called bourgeois culture. As the relation of these institutions to individual autonomy is more clearly delineated, a sort of social map emerges.

Still within the framework of the social sciences, the question can be turned around. The way we just asked the question, we assumed that the human actor is determined by his social location. There are good grounds for this assumption. However, in ways that cannot possibly be elaborated here, human beings are not simple puppets. They are indeed determined by their social location, but they *act back upon* society. One way of formulating this is to say that the relation between human beings and society is a dialectical one. Now, the figures enumerated here also were not just passive reflections of their milieu; rather, they became deliberate, *willfull* actors upon wherever they found themselves. They were actors individually, but they also formed larger or smaller social groups—classes, parties, and the like. We can now ask the question, as Max Weber did: Which social groups have been the "carriers" (*Traeger*) of individual autonomy? Here we come on the bourgeois class, on Protestant clergy, on missionary pedagogues, and on many other collective entities. The word "carrier" suggests (rather felicitously) an epidemiological process. Think, if you will, of individual autonomy as an illness (this, of course, is just how its critics, non-Western and Western, see it): who "carries" this illness from one place to another, and what are the mechanisms of infection? As with illness, most "carriers" do not even realize what they are doing. Thus early Protestant Reformers, preaching their particular version of the Christian

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tradition, certainly did not intend the liberation of the individual in the later sense—nevertheless, they sowed its seeds. Even less did the assorted gangsters and con men of early capitalism intend to lay an economic foundation for democracy—nevertheless they did so. Max Weber understood this very well and expressed it in his concept of the unintended consequences of human actions. This important concept also must be applied in the drawing of our map. Nothing would be more misleading than to study the history of freedom only through the actions of those who set out to advocate or bring it about. (Marx understood this too, despite his various other misunderstandings, and behind both Weber and Marx looms Hegel's profoundly correct notion of the "cunning of history.")

* * *

Let us return once more to Don Quixote. We are touched by his vulnerability. The solitary figure is so easily squashed. In Cervantes's novel, the story ends with Quixote giving up his wild quest for an impossible liberation. He returns to the bosom of the community, ever ready to receive errant knights, and says: "God pardon you, my friends, for you have robbed me of the sweetest existence and most delightful vision any human being ever enjoyed or beheld. Now, indeed, I positively know that the pleasures of this life pass like a shadow and a dream." Take Quixote as a metaphor of freedom and these words as a poignant description of the chances of individual autonomy in the world.

On every level we seek to understand this, we are struck by the precariousness of individual autonomy—or, if you prefer, the vulnerability of freedom. Historically, it is so easy to see the contingencies ("accidents") on which its emergence and survival hinged. Suppose that the Persians had won at Marathon, that the Israelites had perished in the wilderness. One of the silliest contemporary notions is that "you cannot fight ideas with weapons." Of course you can—and, over and over again in history, not only ideas but entire worlds of human experience linked to these ideas were squashed by brute violence. Where today is Albigensianism (not just a set of ideas, but an entire, vibrant human culture)? And where might it be if it had not been for the crusade against Languedoc? Even the language has been stamped out! The same precariousness exists on the level of philosophical analysis: as one analyzes one set of causal determinants after another, where is the "space" for freedom? This intrinsic difficulty was classically expressed in Kant's concept of the

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antinomy of freedom; it is certainly debatable whether his solution to the difficulty will stand up.

Needless to say, the same precariousness, in the most tangible empirical sense, pertains to individual autonomy as it exists in concrete societies. Change the institutional fabric a little here, a little there, and soon individual autonomy as an experience—and eventually even as an idea—becomes impossible to realize. Looking at the world today, it is certainly not fanciful to fear that freedom might "pass like a shadow and a dream." Western individuality and its drama of liberation may well turn out to have been *an episode* in human history, to be recorded (if at all) as a strange aberration. The "common human pattern," in its collectivism, may reassert itself once and for all, and the institutional structures that allowed individual autonomy may be demolished ("disaggregated"), never to reappear—just as the institutions of countless other human cultures have disappeared for good. The figures of individual autonomy (if remembered at all) will then become historical ghosts—like the *perfecti* of Albi, or like the mighty nomads of Central Asia, or like the hunters of the Stone Age.

History is not an inexorable process, but the sum of human actions. Individual autonomy did not appear in history of necessity; conversely, it will not necessarily disappear. For those who believe in its worth, therefore, the enterprise of understanding the phenomenon leads to a political agenda.

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Edith Kurzweil

THE FREUDIANS MEET IN GERMANY

Ever since the Freudians had met in Jerusalem, in 1977, when the officials of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) had turned down a proposal to meet in Berlin, they had debated whether or when to return to Germany; whether it would be worth exposing themselves to painful memories in order to forget, or to let time heal the wounds they knew it could not heal. More than ordinary mortals, they were aware that just being in "Hitlerland" would bring unconscious memories to the surface, and that these memories would be unpleasant to assimilate. Even those psychoanalysts who had worked with German colleagues expected the contact with "German psychoanalysis" to be different from that with the "select" individuals they knew. Still, they perceived the examination of the Nazi past as a special challenge to their profession: knowing "the Others," "the Outsiders," surely would facilitate new, critical evaluations of the complex, unconscious processes of identification, in the psychoanalytic meaning of the term, which determine later attitudes towards all others, as well as towards aggressors and their victims. To what extent such identifications, because of the Nazi past, have been denied, displaced, intellectualized, or otherwise obfuscated, was to be the central theme.

These were some of the considerations by American, and particularly by émigré, analysts (in July 1985). Would their official return to Germany be interpreted as condoning the extermination of six million Jews, or, in more personal terms, would they be betraying the memory of the parents, grandparents, or other relatives killed in concentration camps? Should they work through these conflicts together with the German analysts, and could they do so in the absence of trust? Neither Freud nor Anna Freud any longer could advise them, and besides, they knew that their own consciences alone had to guide them. Thus, some analysts went to Hamburg to recover the past; others brought olive branches; and yet others manifested a certain amount of what one analyst called "Jewish paranoia."

But American, British, or South American psychoanalysts were unaware of the turmoils and conflicts plaguing their German colleagues. To tell or not to tell the murky history of their institutes right after the war, to publicize or play down the opportunism of

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their postwar psychotherapies, to wallow in the guilt of their predecessors or to deny it, to ask for forgiveness or shoulder blame, those were some of the issues they had addressed (or avoided) during their own precongress meetings. Actually, when the German psychoanalysts met in Wiesbaden last fall, the majority allegedly had been more concerned with professional vindication than with "purging" themselves of the Nazi past they had "internalized." Their declarative rather than insightful polemics got such analysts as Margarete Mitscherlich so annoyed that she decided not to go to Hamburg. For those who insisted on honest, open confrontation of *all* issues allegedly were outvoted: the majority wanted to use the congress to get international recognition, and some of them even objected to open press coverage. (Most of their foreign colleagues not only were unaware of these struggles, but did not even realize that the German organization had become the second largest component of the IPA in part because "psychodynamic and psychosomatic illness" became reimbursable ailments by the government-backed insurances.)

Inevitably, the organizers tried to compromise without compromising themselves: they had to appease their friends, to act as buffers, and to assure a respectable attendance. The older Germans who came were concerned for the most part with avoiding clashes resulting from the tensions among themselves and those tensions the occasion was bound to provoke. Some of their candidates, however, did not go along, because they perceived them as too authoritarian: they talked of analytic issues touching on Nazi ideology; they suspected Nazism in their "analyst fathers," and a few spoke of the Nazi past within their families in order to overcome it.

Most of the participants had not known that the original theme was to have been "Mourning, Forgiveness and Reconciliation." But, as Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, the chair of the program committee, explained to the press, "No one whose family was exterminated could be reconciled; none of the Nazis tried ever admitted to more than obeying orders: they neither asked to be forgiven nor admitted guilt." By the same token, she continued, they did not want the meeting to take on the form of a trial: one could not go on blaming the children and grandchildren, many of whom were born after the war. Still, because children will identify with their fathers until they work through their early identifications, psychoanalysis, potentially, might "cure" them. That was why they finally agreed upon "the fate of identifications" as the congress theme—identifications with Freud and their "father analysts," with the German culture and language,

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as well as with their own fathers. And they compromised further by scheduling the Nazi issues on Tuesday alone—the other days were reserved for identification in perversions, in children, in adolescents, and in psychosis. This seemingly bland theme, with all its vicissitudes, managed to lure back the international Freudians.

After fifty-three years, they settled on Hamburg: Berlin would be too "claustrophobic," Munich too reminiscent of the rise of Hitler, Frankfurt too small, and Bonn or Wiesbaden too "American." Furthermore, Hamburg's liberal history, its beautiful sights, good museums and hotels, and, most of all, its openminded and erudite mayor, it was hoped, would help wipe out painful memories. The mayor proved his mettle. In straightforward fashion, he reminded the analysts that when they had met in Wiesbaden, in 1932, they had ignored the threat posed by National Socialism. He hoped that now they would put their "scientific tools and resources" at the service of humanity, by probing into the depths of the German psyche —to preserve freedom, and "to escape the historical entanglement." He attacked the compromises Germans had made with Hitler, supposedly "for the sake of preserving a whole which soon ceased to exist." Graciously, he wondered whether the psychoanalysts could help us all "to be and to act better." Just as graciously, Chasseguet-Smirgel, who, for the occasion even had learned German (assisted by quotes from Heine and Goethe's *Faust*), said that those psychoanalysts who came had done so "to heal some wounds, to make some friends, and to learn to forgive." (The marvelous food which was served after this opening ceremony went far to facilitate the welcome.)

Actually, American attendance was considerably smaller than usual. And, although no statistical breakdown was available, it seemed to me that many of the close to 1,800 Hamburg pilgrims went to recover a past they had not known personally, and that the Americans who participated, on balance, were younger than those at previous meetings—not only because many of the old generation have died, but because some chose to stay home. In other words, the congress was full of good motives and good will, as well as of apprehension and naiveté.

On theoretical issues, the psychoanalysts performed as usual. During the first session, for instance, Melvin Glasser of London gave his overview of perversions, of their roots in early identification, their possible manifestations in "acting out," and their means of treatment. The next speaker, Joyce McDougall of Paris, questioned

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the diagnosis of perversion, and illustrated her point by presenting a patient who had used his sexuality (sometimes with women and other times with men) compulsively, in the service of homeostasis. Treatment focused on his fantasies, she said (they cannot be counted as perversions), and explained how she had used them to help her patient gain insight and to change his life. Jacob Arlow of New York criticized Glasser for having paid too little attention to the roles of the (unconscious) pre-Oedipal father and the Oedipal mother, and McDougall for having forgotten Freud's "biological" theories. André Lussier's (Montreal) reservations had to do with the diagnoses of both analysts: he wondered whether the patients they had described were perverts, since "the true pervert fails to be reassured." The controversy elicited a heated discussion from the floor, as commentators, once again, defended their own theoretical positions—"American," "Kleinian," "French," or "South American."

They did so again when they met in workshops during the afternoon. There, they discussed such technical questions as the vicissitudes and differences between primary and secondary identification, the confusion between internal reality and object identification, and that between responses to "catastrophic anxiety," to omnipotence, or to wishes of symbiosis with the object (usually the mother). Expectedly, a German psychoanalyst thought they ought to drop object relations theory and go back to drive theory, and a French one explained the "silence" about perversion as a result of the analysts' difficulties in identifying with such patients, while an Argentinian thought a Kleinian analysis was the answer. In "my" workshop, the babel of tongues reached its climax when a young American analyst suggested that they had no answers, because so few analysts were treating perverts, if only because institutional priorities intervened: "Anyone treating such cases, in America, is not accepted into the inner circle—where patients are supposed to enter analysis, experience what is expected, and leave."

The analysts allowed themselves to get emotional over perversions, but then tried to shield themselves from too much personal involvement in questions of the Nazis and the Holocaust. This was clear when they explained the mechanisms of identity/separation in children reared in concentration camps and these children's precocious awareness of the degradation of their parents—which led to confusion, in a situation where children had to learn when to obey and yet knew that ultimate obedience entailed death. But the unease of the commentators came through when they got overly scientific, or when

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they differentiated between the identifications of children who had been in foster families, those who also had changed religion, and those who had been in the camps. Some tried to water down the enormity of such trauma by offering studies of ghetto children as comparisons, but they were told that external trauma could not be equated with internal trauma, and that the ego deficits of deprived children did not really resemble the identifications resulting from the internalizations of life and death struggles in concentration camps—in id, ego, as well as superego, structures. These children suffered from the "autistic encapsulation," offered an Argentinian, which later on, also, would be responsible for much acting out.

Indeed, this turned out to be a "warm-up" session for Tuesday, the day dedicated to the Nazi past. Somehow, when autistic encapsulation was postulated as the consequence of terror—the locus for the inner drama between the self and the other—and then was related to "losing language along with identity," the experiences of these children often were intellectualized, as were such apprehensions as "I must not be like me in order to survive." Still, we learned that identification processes may initiate mourning; that the inability to mourn (as the Mitscherlichs already wrote in the 1960s) also fulfilled death wishes; that fantasies of hope and projections for the future had been used to deny hopelessness and to serve as props for survival; and that the need to forget, subsequently, had induced the "shameful silences." For after they got out, these children (along with adult survivors) wanted to be like other children (or adults)—in order to live in a world that refused to listen to them.

It is impossible to describe the mounting discomfort when a German analyst (he had finished his training at the Berlin Goering Institut in 1941) spoke of the "criminalized legality" of the Nazi period—whose language alone would have sufficed to kill all critical thought. In part, the audience reacted to the cold tone of this presentation and, in part, to the material about a woman who remembered her father's Nazi activities and who alternately identified with them by "being God's daughter," or by "not knowing who she was." But during the coffee break it became clear that Germans too felt uneasy: one told me that he could not deal with the anti-Semitism of a Jewish patient; another described a colleague's philo-Semitism as suspect; still another talked of the difficulties of analyzing former Nazis; and yet another commented that only with much time would they come to terms with the past. And many Germans were angry not to have been "represented" by a more passionate speaker. For all the psycho-

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analysts were shaken by the subject itself: trained to use their empathic selves as a "scientific instrument," they increasingly spoke of denial by victims and aggressors, and by themselves. The subject of the Holocaust had come alive.

It continued to gain momentum that afternoon, when the debate turned to the history of psychoanalysis during the Hitler period, which, during the last two years, has been the focus of a bitter (German) controversy. Here, Karen Brecht, one of the analysts who had put together an exhibit on German psychoanalytic history, redeemed her compatriots by stating publicly that she had found unpleasant and upsetting evidence of collaboration with the Nazis, and that only by digging up the entire truth could they overcome the past. She almost named names, arguing that the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish members needed to be clarified, that institutional opportunism had to be exposed. For German analysts, it appeared, the pretext of saving psychoanalysis had obscured the fact that it had been sacrificed. (In the process, I may add, the analysts' analyses had had to remain incomplete.) This was demonstrated when the ninety year-old Jeanne Lampl-de-Groot took the floor and told the audience about the much-quoted meeting between Freud, Karl Mueller-Braunschweig and Felix Boehm which she witnessed (she described the former as a nice weakling and the latter as an untrustworthy manipulator), after the Austrian Anschluss in 1938. In a moving statement, she recalled how Boehm had claimed that *Gleichschaltung* would save psychoanalysis. Contradicting the Germans' official history, she stated that Freud had said: "I cannot and will not prohibit or force anything on you"; and that he immediately had left the room.

There were other sessions on the past of psychoanalysis: on the analysts' identification with Freud himself, with the theory, and with specific aspects of his research. They spoke of Freud's Jewish background, his Germanness, his sense of humor, of the multiplicity of selective identifications by his followers, and of guarding against idealizations. Peter Neubauer described Freud's Vienna and *fin-de-siècle* culture, where Beer-Hoffmann, Schnitzler, and von Hoffmannsthal wrote on psychic suffering, where discussions of the "materialists" versus the "mentalists" were common, and where narcissism was a favored theme. Although this history is known to the older Freudians, most of their candidates (like the rest of the younger generation) do not know much about it. Only the French, as Didier Anzieu soon demonstrated, are conversant with the past—a past that currently revolves around Paris. Essentially, in a *tour de force*, Anzieu

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began by telling us that he had learned German by reading Freud, that Freud had been at home in a number of languages—from Latin and Greek to Czech, Yiddish, German, French and English—and that it was his use of these other languages and cultures that made him who he was. As might be expected, the Viennese analyst Harald Leupold-Loewenthal vehemently objected to elevating the formative influence of language over that of Vienna in Freud's life.

On the last day, the Freudians evaluated their "profoundly moving congress." They would have wanted to explore the Nazi phenomenon further, would have liked to understand more about "mass psychosis, murder, phobia, and questions of identification with a leader." But, they never referred to the massive literature on the subject by political scientists, sociologists or psychologists, either because they were unfamiliar with it, or because the focus on conscious phenomena was discarded as unsuitable or too superficial. Nevertheless, there were implications of the need for a political agenda, when "activists" mentioned Freud's "Letter to Einstein," and their opponents obliquely referred to Freud's foolish politics that supported the Austrian emperor at the beginning of World War I, or to his wish for putting science above politics. Apparently, these issues had been dealt with by the organizers, who, under the aegis of the IPA president, Adam Limentani, had held out against the "peacenicks'" pressure to schedule an "official" rally as a congress activity. Instead, they compromised by setting it up at the university.

I went in the hope of hearing that psychoanalysts might have a special contribution to make, that their (unequalled) ability to penetrate the deepest layers of human anxiety might illuminate the mechanisms that make us overly aggressive. Instead, Hanna Segal of London gave the standard disarmament speech. Had her picture of the danger of annihilation done more than repeat (and even distort) the evils being perpetrated by the United States and Great Britain, had she even mentioned the existence of the Soviet Union as something other than a peace-loving nation, or the danger of nuclear weapons in such countries as Pakistan or Libya, a viable dialogue might have been started. But under the circumstance, her contentions that "we are preparing for a war against an external enemy in order to face internal problems," in fact amounted to a call for unilateral disarmament. I could only marvel at the uncritical acceptance of her so-called facts by around three hundred independent analysts and at their lack of political savvy. In psychoanalytic terms, her diagnoses of paronoid mechanisms (like those in perversions), of our

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wish to "self-destruct" (like lemmings or beaching whales, as Martin Wangh reminded me), or of primitive omnipotence (as in Nazis and their victims) probably were valid. Segal, however, did not suggest examining the reasons or "cures" for such behavior: she expected her listeners to accept her diagnosis on faith, and to act on it politically. The latter responded because they recognized the mechanism of denial Segal's argument relied upon as a frequent response to impending danger. And yet, they failed to question the fact that Segal "denied" using her psychoanalytic know-how to mobilize fear: nor were they aware that she thereby had left behind the "scientific" arena she continued to invoke.

This rally was different from other such rallies because it was in Germany, because, aside from Segal, the speakers (and all their references and "research") were American, and because none of them seemed to understand the intellectual and political context of their audience. The latter responded to a variety of stimuli which had little to do with the Anglo-Saxon concerns of the speakers. By far the largest segment of the listeners consisted of younger Germans. Their honest fear of once again falling for illegitimate authority had to lead them to admire the Anglo-Saxons' denunciations of their own "leaders"; and they were being reminded of last year's apprehensions about the Pershing missiles. In addition, the depiction of President Reagan and other Anglo-Saxon officials mirrored their dislike of Chancellor Kohl in whose person they (correctly) perceive the insensitivity and Babbitry of everything they expect Germans to shed. The recently discovered opportunism of German psychoanalysts, right after the war, further widened the customary gap between analysts and their candidates—a gap which has been greater in Germany than elsewhere. So, when Segal or John Mack called on them not to remain silent about their fears of annihilation, they felt implicated in the silences of their elders, who had let the Nazis into power. And as one remarkably honest young woman told me, the peace movement made her feel good again, the way she had felt as a student in the late 1960s. (Since psychoanalysts, as a rule, do not follow politics closely, they seemed unaware of the fact that Mack publicly had admitted that his studies of children's fear of the bomb were prejudiced, because the children he interviewed had been frightened by movies or by their parents.)

The South Americans' responses to pacifism were more ambiguous. One of them said that "Pacifist movements in the past were communist movements, but one had to go along with them, because

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they are needed." But they were more interested in psychoanalytic issues, and they applauded all discussions that might conceivably "force leaders to be aware of psychoanalytic insights." In general, however, the South Americans' opposition to fascism led them to be leery of both right and left totalitarianism. Some "political" Americans at the meetings talked of fascism in California—apparently unable to differentiate between the systematic extermination of millions and discriminatory laws that ought to be corrected.

It is difficult to sort out theoretical from organizational issues in any international organization. But the IPA has more problems than other organizations of its kind. I was told that at the business meeting they were informed of a class action suit by American psychologists (for restraint of trade) against the American Psychoanalytic Association, the New York Psychoanalytic Association and the Columbia Group, because they all bar nonmedical analysts from membership. Ironically, the international Freudians have been down on the Americans for this restriction (on theoretical grounds), but now were being legally implicated (the IPA is the umbrella organization for them all), and thus might have to "defend" a policy of which they did not approve.

The intellectual components of international cooperation, of course, are even more problematic. On the one hand, the psychoanalysts' expertise allows for the examination of unconscious processes triggering aggression, fear, etc., which other "experts" lack. On the other hand, they tend to jump from explaining individuals' psychic phenomena to social ones, without accounting for the impact of mediating institutions such as family, religion, or education; they insist that they nevertheless are being scientific and, when pushed, state or imply that Freud did the same thing. In their defense, it must be said that the older generation is conversant with both organizational and intellectual history, which includes the institutionalization of former allegiances and conflicts (personal, organizational and political). As Otto Kernberg commented, they all know their "maps," and thus interpret what is meant when a scientific term is used—by American ego psychologists, Kleinians, South American Kleinians with Lacanian traces, neo-Lacanians, "imaginative" French Freudians as opposed to "scientific Americans," and so on. For the younger generations, however, as one analyst quipped, it tends to be "my institute, Freud or wrong."

Theoretical differences had been incorporated in the program, when for example, a clinical child analysis from a Mahlerian devel-

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opmental perspective was followed by a more Kleinian "projective" one, and then discussed by "opponents." Comments from the audience, of course, reiterated the commentators' theoretical convictions: from the level of applause it was clear that IPA friendships develop along theoretical wavelengths and that these do, in fact, cross national boundaries. Another means of overcoming them has been through cooperation in organizing the bi-yearly congresses. That is how the leading figures from each country have gotten to respect (or dislike) one another.

After this congress, an increasing number of Germans will become *persona grata* in this network of organizers. *That* was why they pushed the Freudians to come to Hamburg. Whether the best of the German analysts, like oil on water, will float to the top, is not yet clear. For anyone who attended this meeting was aware that Nazism both lives on and is being conquered. But to have gone to Hamburg, I believe, helped psychoanalysts of the world to face the issues and to initiate a dialogue. A few young Germans *did* learn that so many "foreign" analysts are Jewish; a few others *did* realize that professional descent from Freud was different from being born Jewish. Yet when a young German got up during the closing session and said he was pleased finally to have met Jews, the past unexpectedly reappeared in yet another form, and the tone of the German training analyst who took offense at this remark recalled it further. Still, the Americans learned that there are more *good* Germans than they knew, and that it is worthwhile to cooperate with them.

Dieter Ohlmeier, who invited me and knew I would report on this congress, had the courage to preside over the cacophony of conflicting interests, ideas, politics and memories. But the Freudians who came were courageous as well: a few of them, recalling Auschwitz, were unable to take showers; others relived painful details of their emigration; yet others could not sleep; and a Dutch analyst recalled having been "saved" by an official who refused to turn her family over to the Gestapo.

That was how the Freudians recalled the horrors the Nazis had wrought, and they fortunately were too busy to note that during the same week a sixty-eight year-old former Nazi who had "assisted in the murder of at least one hundred Jews," was sentenced to three years in prison. Given the presence of this past, one must credit the German analysts for their painstaking efforts at rehabilitation. In their uphill struggle, many of them were helped by intense and personal encounters with visitors, and by the ensuing honest—though

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frequently painful—dialogue. So, even if many of their analyses may be "incomplete," and questions of "Mourning, Forgiveness and Reconciliation" remained unresolved, most of the hosts deserve "A" for effort.

On the whole, one had to be impressed by the seriousness and passion with which most of the participants approached the very challenging themes of the conference. And most of the technical discussions were on a high level—in spite of disagreements. Nevertheless, if a consensus was expected, or if one expected definitive solutions to all the questions that were raised, then, perhaps the aims of this congress were too ambitious. How could it resolve these complex issues by bringing together Americans who still felt uneasy about Germany, Germans who were caught in a web of guilt and expiation, and peace advocates who confused problems of politics with those of psychoanalysis.

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John Elderfield

ART AND MEMORY

The terms *modern* and *contemporary* suggest a gap in the recent past that we instinctively recognize yet find difficult to define. Part of my intention here is to make a rudimentary chart that will allow us to navigate from one to the other. And the reason that this is needed is that these two terms seem distinct from each other in a way that they did not earlier in this modern century. Clearly, the longer the life of modern art, the more necessary is some term to describe the particular fragment of it that exists in the present: under the current scheme of things, what is contemporary (or contemporary-modern) today is just plain modern tomorrow, and so on. But the distinction that I have in mind is broader than this merely convenient one and responds to a contemporary sense that modern art is not, in fact, continuing to go on.

All art, of course, is a conventionalized activity and as such is shaped by past art. One of the traditional functions of art historians (though often performed, I think, with excessive glee) has been to point to the ubiquity of copyright infringements among artists. But there are times—and now, it is being suggested, is one of them—when even art historians have to accept that what usually (though erroneously) gets called a *break in tradition* has taken place. Why this phrase is necessarily erroneous, I will come to later. It is enough to say now that the relationship between contemporary art and its modern past has indeed changed significantly over recent years, significantly enough for many observers to feel that entirely separate terms are required to distinguish current art from art as recent as a decade or so ago.

I do not agree. At least, I do not require a terminology that suggests the end of the modern period. (That, as I hope to show, seems willful as well as premature.) But a useful and practical way of accounting for the recent changes in art is needed—and, perhaps more importantly, in the climate in which art is made. Neither the apocalyptic notion of postmodernism nor the opposite theory of a general decline in taste (which, if it has indeed happened, is more a symptom than a cause) is satisfactory: both are disguised value judgments and often come down in the end simply to whether a particular critic does or does not happen to like contemporary art. This

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is not to say that studies in taste and in futurology do not have their part in considering what is obviously a complex subject, but only after certain more central issues have been addressed.

What I am addressing here—in the belief that it is indeed central—is the problem of coexistence between contemporary art and its modern past, by which I mean the way that contemporary art draws upon its modern past and remembers it. If contemporary art is now indeed different from modern art—and clearly some kind of revision of modernism has taken place—the degree of that difference, and of that revision, can most usefully be gauged, I believe, according to the status now granted to the modern past: according to the degree to which modern memory is retained, or has lapsed, in contemporary art.

Let me call attention to a term that got stranded as the contemporary and the modern divided. The term is *avant-garde.* Once central to the vocabulary of this century's art criticism, it now seems strangely anachronistic, lacking the pugnacious authority it once had, apparently an embarrassment to both moderns and contemporaries. Before it entirely disappears from view, let us look at it again, for its fate will help us understand the extent to which affairs have changed since it was the rallying cry of the new.

The term, of course, is a military term that was transposed first to politically advanced (i.e., left-wing) groups in pre-1848 France, then to advanced artists in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who played (it was assumed) a comparably aggressive social role. The validity of the term as applied to the artists lay in that their aggression was directed against academies and institutions on the one hand and popular bourgeois taste on the other, both of which were agents of conservatism. To seek separation from complacent, established values is not, however, to denigrate the past; if anything, the opposite is true. The early avant-garde was opposed to those who sought to preserve the past in either a sanctified or a sentimentalized form and in so doing preserved only academicism and kitsch. The idea that the avant-garde was against the past itself only came later (around the time of World War I), and it was this idea that eventually caused those artists and critics sympathetic to the goals and standards of the early modernists to feel unhappy with the term *avant-garde* itself. For in its new sense, which accrued to it with futurism and dadaism, it held connotations that were decidedly antimodernist, since the aim of the original avant-garde was to reinvent or reimagine the past and its standards in a period that paro-

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died or diminished them, but never to attempt to cancel them, which would be to capitulate to the anticultural values of the establishment.

We have here already, in the first and second meanings of the term *avant-garde*, a distinction between *modern* and *contemporary*. Both seek to alter the past. The modern, however, implies a serious and involved relationship to the past, a relationship that requires criticism and radical reimagining of the past. The contemporary is more schismatic and implies a clean break with the past for the sake of the new. This distinction I owe to Frank Kermode, and I will return to it shortly. But first, I want to say more about the way in which the idea of breaking with the past does not oppose, but risks capitulating to, currently established and anticultural values.

The clue here is another word that, if not cause for embarrassment in matters cultural (if not elsewhere), certainly should be. The word is *progress*. The second of the two avant-garde waves proclaimed itself contemptuous of the past and in favor of things new. But even the dadaists did not believe that cancellation of the past was possible; anyone who knows dadaism from study and not from rumor knows that. While a sense of forward movement is important for art, that sense (as Northrop Frye points out) is one of fresh discovery in the renewal of familiar values. The reason that it is important (and why the dadaists made so much noise about it) is that it is what saves art from sentimentality, for the sentimental (according to Frye) is a fixation on the familiar, a wallowing in familiar responses to familiar forms. It was this that the dadaists opposed (and rightly so)—only, however, to get themselves into trouble at times when they, like many others, confused this sense of discovery with progress itself.

Art, unlike industry, does not progress. But belief in progress is implicit in the artistic conception of an avant-garde, carried over from the political usage of that term and from the industrial society to which political and artistic avant-gardes alike had an uneasily symbiotic relationship. "Industrial society," writes the historian J. H. Plumb, "unlike the commercial, craft and agrarian societies which it replaces, does not need the past. Its intellectual orientation is towards change rather than conservation, towards exploitation and consumption. The new methods, new processes, new forms of living of scientific and industrial society have no sanction in the past and no roots in it." Something of this attitude, this malaise, crept into the idea of avant-garde and into modernism itself. Indeed, to a

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significant extent it produced modernism, which responded to the fact that the past no longer had the sanction of authority it once had.

Insofar as one can talk of such a thing as a break in tradition, one of its meanings is the loss of faith in historically transmitted authority. In his commentary on the passage from Plumb, Lionel Trilling points out how "the narrative past . . . has lost its authenticating power. Far from being an authenticating agent, indeed, it has become the very type of inauthenticity. *Here* and *now* may be unpleasant, but at least they are authentic in being really here and now, and not susceptible to explanation by some shadowy *there* and *then*." To the extent, however, that art celebrates this state of affairs—to the extent it seeks separation from the past for the sake of progress—it turns if not into anti-art then into derivative art. For it is a perennial rule of artistic development that the more an art attempts to cut itself off from the past, the more, it seems, it is doomed simply to copy it. This is why the greatest of the early modernists were actually nervous about their modernity and sought not merely to "innovate," but to preserve (not oppose) the tradition of the past through innovation. The consciousness of modernity, we need to keep reminding ourselves, is a distinctly modern thing. What I propose calling *neomodernism* (rather than *postmodernism*) elevates this consciousness above value itself.

Kermode uses the terms *palaeo-* and *neomodernism* to make a distinction—one I gladly adopt—between original modernism and a kind of modernism that exaggerates its specifically modern content, and with intriguing results. He gives us this example of how neomodernist art differs from the earlier-established form: "Whereas such a poem as *The Waste Land* draws upon a tradition which imposes the necessity of form, though it may have none that can be apprehended without a disciplined act of faith, a new modernism prefers and professes to do without the tradition and the illusion." In other words, while earlier modernism felt the need for formal innovation in order to match tradition, and required of its audience a belief and commitment to its "necessity of formalism" (to use Clement Greenberg's phrase), neomodernism accepts and uses the formal innovations of earlier modernism but rejects its beliefs, including and especially its traditionalism and its formalism. Even in its most subversive attitude toward tradition and form—especially so, perhaps—it draws upon past tradition and past form, if only because, as Harold Rosenberg once pointed out, "the subversion of

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literary form cannot be established except by literary means, that is, through an effort essentially formal." Far from being less concerned with form than original (or palaeo-) modernism, neomodernism (and what is called *postmodernism*) is simply concerned with it in a different way. Characteristic of both the older and the newer neomodernism is a special—almost theoretical—kind of self-consciousness about the styles and methods of the classic modernism it seeks to replace.

Self-consciousness about styles and methods is an essential part, indeed a defining characteristic, of classic modernism. But in neomodernist art, a different kind of self-consciousness obtains: in rejecting the beliefs that produced modernist forms, neomodernist art uses that form at arm's length, as it were—from an almost ironical distance. Ironical self-awareness and technical introversion are both crucial to this kind of art (hence its stylistically eclectic meldings). They tell at one and the same time of a highly sophisticated (if somewhat theoretical) understanding of modernist form and of a refusal to be engaged fully in form itself, which is treated as a kind of tool or a specialized language rather than as an actual source of value. Just as repudiation of modernism's "traditional" preoccupation with value characterized neomodernism when it first appeared, a sense of uncertainty, indeed embarrassment, about the whole question of value infects the new neomodernism.

It is fascinating that this decline in the prestige of evaluation coincides, in the new neomodernism, with art that no longer, apparently, can outrage its audience as earlier modernist and neomodernist art could. Lionel Trilling observes that "at the present moment, art cannot be said to make exigent demands upon the audience. That segment of our culture which is at all responsive to contemporary art is wholly permeable by it. . . . The audience likes or does not like, is pleased or not pleased—the faculty of 'taste' has reestablished itself at the centre of the experience of art." This only goes to show, however, that simply liking or not liking, being pleased or displeased, is not the same as evaluating, which implies something broader and more testing than mere consumerism. It also shows, or suggests, the reason why the term *avant-garde* has become anachronistic: insofar as new art is voraciously consumed, the battle of the avant-garde against academies and institutions on the one hand and popular bourgeois taste on the other is definitely over. Whether the battle was won or lost is a matter of dispute that is less important here than the fact of consumerism itself. For there is a for-

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mula that helps, I think, to explain this consumerism and the stylistic self-consciousness on which it feeds: popular attitudes toward art have changed to the same extent that the past has declined in status, from something that confers authority and has an authenticating power for the present to something that is separate from the present and therefore a matter of mere curiosity.

Thinking about the way in which art and the past, the new and the old, find themselves on exactly the same shelf in the mind of the modern consumer, I am reminded of signs that I used to see in English seaside gift shops, which read, "Novelties and Souvenirs." It is precisely this kind of sentimentalized, possessive, and often cheaply glamorous understanding of things excerpted from the context of history and historical value that requires us to consider the status of modern memory. Walter Benjamin, believing that the loss in authenticating power of the past was absolute and irremediable, and attempting to understand how the past affected the present after the narrative connection that previously linked them had been broken, concluded that the transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability. With the past accessible only to an act of deliberate excavation, narration is replaced by quotation.

It is only *apparently* paradoxical that the breaking of the narrative past with the emergence of modernism was accompanied by a drastically increased interest in and knowledge of the past. The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of unprecedented expansion in the field of museology: a far wider array of works of art and of objects that provided stimulation for the arts than ever before was made available to artists and the public, and historical curiosity extended to cultures hitherto hardly investigated at all. It was, Northrop Frye observes (and not with too much exaggeration), as if "the cemeteries were on the march, the entire past awakening to an aesthetic apocalypse." This coincidental breaking with and rediscovery of the past is only apparently paradoxical because, to the extent that the past is no longer continuous with the present, it becomes the object of curiosity and research.

A comparable expansion of interest in art (albeit on a reduced scale), and especially in modern art, has occurred over the past decade or so. Museums were never fuller. Art history was never more popular. Art is being consumed as never before. Much recent art and architecture is full of quotations from the past—and one of the few rules of iconographical development is that a new subject of art allows the artist to stand outside or above that subject and

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observe it dispassionately, with curiosity, because it is culturally problematic. The past itself is now apparently a problematic subject, to be studied and observed and cited by artists. The modern past, as well as what precedes it, now seems so distant and disconnected from the contemporary present as to have lost its authenticating power. It is now ancient history, accessible only to excavation in discontinuous fragments. At least, that is how it appears from the vantage point of postmodernism (or neomodernism, as I still prefer to call it).

The great early modernists, I said earlier, were nervous about their modernity, which threatened to cut them off from the past. We see specific evidence of this in the way that modernism, when it began, attempted, by use of Arcadian subjects, to incorporate into painting a vision symbolic of the past, but one that was so unfamiliar (because symbolic of a past never in fact experienced) as to seem genuinely new. How this vision was framed and how it declined is quite another subject. Suffice it to say that 1909 saw its apotheosis and its end, and three years later emerged the quintessentially modern expression of modernism's break with the past, with continuity, with narrative connections, with "finish" (an expression that turns out to be quintessential to so-called postmodernism too—which confirms my suspicion of that term, and of the break with modernism that it connotes). I am referring, of course, to collage.

Collage is about discontinuity, fragmentation, quotation, citability. It is not only an untraditional form; it is an antitraditional one. Its invention responds to the decline of fictional modes, to the end of "story" and hence of history. It is, if anything is, emblematic of the values and standards, both positive and negative, that define modernism's separation from the premodernist past.

Walter Benjamin was acutely conscious of the centrality of collage to that kind of modernism which accepted its break with the past and sought new strategies by which to acknowledge the discontinuity of the new from the old. For only by acknowledging that discontinuity, Benjamin believed, could one begin to discover new ways of remembering the past and making it present again. His readings of Proust, taken in connection with certain ideas from Freud, suggested a useful distinction in the very mechanism of remembering itself—that between *memory* and *remembrance*. Memory (*mémoire volontaire*, *Erinnerung*) is destructive of the past as such in absorbing it into a continuum that stretches out past and present, putting the past in chronological order, and protecting that order, that

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tradition (more than the events that comprise it). It systematizes the past, because whatever is recalled by memory is visualized from the viewpoint of the present, from which the past keeps its distance and guards its traditional authority. In contrast to this, remembrance (*mémoire involontaire*, *Gedächtnis*) protects the events of the past by destroying the traditional order (both chronological and systematic) that separates past and present. By seizing hold of images from the past as they are triggered by sensations experienced in the present, remembrance joins past and present and lost time is found again. Thus, the continuity of past and present is not to be accepted as given by tradition but requires, rather, destruction of tradition (or acceptance of that destruction) and then excavation from within its ruins of the genuine and original fragments, in order not to revive the past but to renew it. This is what David Smith once called the artist's "visionary reconstruction" of the past. Through it, tradition is simultaneously broken and repaired.

But what we popularly call *breaking with tradition* is not, in fact, breaking with the past—in fact, not really breaking with tradition at all. Insofar as ambitious, original artists do break with tradition, it is only in the sense that they cannot afford to be involved with anything as wayward and a priori as tradition. The artist specifically involves himself with other artists and other works of art (those fragments of the past) but not with "tradition." For what could such a thing be except another's priorities, another's tradition and not one's own? In addition, the ambitious, original artist is consequently in a combative situation not with the past but with present interpretations of the past. George Kubler once wrote of "open" and "arrested" sequences of the past. The original artist, in these terms, breaks out of arrested sequences and back into the open territory of the past, there to select his armory with which to attack the present and the memory of the past that it preserves. His battle, we might say, is with convention and not with tradition. Actually setting out to break with tradition requires an arrested notion of what tradition is. And such an approach inevitably leaves tradition untouched. It never opens it to attack in the first place.

Collage, I am suggesting, is symbolic of modernism's distrust of memory and the transmission of historical authority. And it is symbolic of modernism's leaning to remembrance, to the reconstruction of such authority through citation from the past. It is, however, only symbolic of these things.

Most specifically, if collage itself does, in fact, reconstruct the

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past, it is only in the sense that the fragments it uses belong to the past. It does not reconstruct the art-historical past. At least, it never used to. Now, a great deal of neomodernist art adopts the methods of collage to put together citations from the past under the assumption that tradition is thus renewed. Such an assumption, I believe, is erroneous (and here I presume to disagree with Walter Benjamin), for mere citation of the past is never enough to remake tradition. Unless past is carried over into present in an act of metaphorical imagination that removes both from the contingencies of time, causing their essential common nature to stand out, there is no renewal. That is the real message of Proustian remembrance. And far from renewing the past, the act of citation seems merely to parody it.

The argument in favor of citation (Benjamin's argument) claims that whatever is quoted, because it is taken to be a piece of untampered reality, seems to be more authentic than anything presented in a narrative (hence fictional) way. In an age when the fictionalized past no longer can be believed in, the only authenticity is to be found in fragments that allow the otherwise mute past to speak for itself.

One major difficulty with this view is the impossibility of selection without interpretation: nothing that is framed by art ever speaks for itself. The act of documentation (as Susan Sontag said of photography) merely assumes a voyeuristic attitude of disengagement from things while presenting them as being of interest. And a second major difficulty with Benjamin's view (as Sontag again points out) is that almost anything so presented seems interesting. Whereas art that genuinely seeks to renew the past (that seeks to match it) must somehow put the past in order—that is to say, make discriminations between things good and things bad, between things positive and things retrograde (however difficult such discriminations are in an age when order cannot be assumed)—the act of citation, by its very nature, refuses such ordering. It replaces the ordering of the past (and the attack on the present that this requires) with acceptance of the present as a framework within which to insert choice nuggets from the past. As such, it misleads us into thinking that the past is not hard to acquire, and, choosing from the past not on the basis of value but of interest, it tends to eclecticism and permissiveness—ultimately to what is euphemistically known as *pluralism*: abolition of the hierarchies of value on which serious art has traditionally been based.

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Perhaps the most obvious art of citation that we have now is so-called postmodernist architecture. It has recently been suggested (by Clement Greenberg) that a better case can be made for postmodernism in architecture than in the other arts: since the modern in architecture meant geometry, austerity, and the refusal of decoration or embellishment, to reject these ideals is to be postmodern. But the situation is by no means as simple as this. Recent architecture may indeed reject modernist ideals; it still accepts, however, or at least defers to, the context of modernism—and often indeed, beneath its embellishments, to the language of modernism as well. A great deal of "postmodernist" architecture seems to comprise modern, pared-down structures reembellished and distorted to produce those famous "complexities and contradictions" through the play and tension between the modernist framework and the way this framework has changed. As with certain forms of recent realist painting, full appreciation of this art requires and assumes knowledge of modernism itself, for it is in implicit comparison with modernist forms that the archaisms, the eccentricities, the borrowings from premodernist art achieve their force.

Historicism is one of the essential defining qualities of what is commonly described as postmodernism. Historicism is an ironical mode (as is citation itself) in that it depends upon acute stylistic self-consciousness and disengagement to establish a sense of disconnection between the speaker and what is spoken of. At its most overt, it functions like historical fiction, which, as T. S. Eliot observed, finally tells us more about the time of its creation than about the time it attempts to recall. (Some recent projects in neoclassical architecture approach this norm.) But it always requires stepping outside or above one's moment to choose a form of expression that depends for at least part of its force on the contrast between the established tradition of that moment and whatever novelties or souvenirs there are to modify it. This is not to say, however, that merely using traditional forms to modify a modern style is historicist. It is possible to describe as historicist Picasso's neoclassicism of the 1920s, but it somehow resists that description, for historicism produces a sense of shock by contrasting old and new; blending them is not enough. All the same, this example is an instructive one. Like other post-World War I realist art (for example, Matisse's Nice Period Style and German *neue Sachlichkeit* painting), Picasso's neoclassicism responds to the admission of historical discontinuity symbolized by collage, and at the

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same time to the discontinuity that collage brought to the tradition of painting itself. Realist painting after the First World War begins painting again, as it were, by tying it to the past that existed before collage. Recent realism, which achieved its current popularity only after painting had apparently "died" with minimal and conceptual art, responds to a similar sense of crisis in painting itself.

But there is one important difference: whereas post-World War I realism presents itself as a genuinely new vision, dependent upon but confidently going beyond prewar innovations, most recent realism uses its realism to fill out, as it were, the compositional structures of earlier abstract art. Not all current realism works like this, but we often do see realist imagery that seems to "hang on" to what are in effect all-over paintings, gestural abstractions, "open" field paintings, hard-edge paintings, and so on. We also have some kinds of realist art that define themselves in relation to such earlier forms of abstract-influenced "realism" as pop art and, recently, realist art that revives precollage realism, especially expressionism, as if wanting to take that further step backwards into the innocent past. The latter especially is historicist, but so, ultimately, are all forms that set past and present together and against each other in this way.

All new art, of course, looks backward and forwards together: in escaping the immediate past, an artist will always find affinity with some earlier style. But what is special (though by no means unique) about the present situation are two things. First, a lot of newer art plays off, in a highly self-conscious and almost dialectical way, its past inheritance against its present topicality. And second, much of it draws both upon "mainstream" modernist abstraction and upon what was previously often its entrenched opposite (namely pop, realist, expressionist, and fantasy art), seeking its topicality in the melding of these two strains. The situation of realist painting is only a part of this phenomenon. The way in which much new image painting falls between pop art and matter painting, pattern painting between vernacular decoration and all-over abstraction, some forms of new wave art between gesture and genre painting, and others between color painting and popular illustrations is also very much to the point here. So is the way that a lot of recent sculpture combines surrealism and minimalism, or realism and constructivism. All of these things speak of the hybrid structures to which a great deal of new art seems to aspire.

None of this, I hasten to add, is necessarily a value judgment on the art in question. (There are no such things as categorical

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judgments.) Historicism and eclecticism are no more incapable of yielding good art within their own terms of reference than are any other modes of expression. But they do bring their own particular dangers. One is that the unity they offer is merely a compensatory unity—compensatory, that is, of the discontinuity with tradition that they express—and, as such, limited to its specific historical moment. This is a real enough danger, but one with which modernism itself has always had to deal.

More urgent, however, is the danger of academicism, which can easily occur when styles that are stripped of the beliefs and commitments that engendered them continue to be used. Neomodernist art responds to the availability of the modernist past and, to the extent that it divides past from present and treats it as over and done with, risks enslavement to moribund forms—tends, in ignorance of what produced past forms, simply to repeat them, exaggerating the drawing perhaps, but that is all. Another danger is the invitation to sentimentality, the risk of evoking sensations that are not fresh challenges to taste but nostalgic references to past sensations—which is always the hallmark of a reactionary art, however new it presents itself as being. For this is in effect to surrender to received taste: rather than forcing a revision of consumer values, it accredits them.

The original battle that produced modernism was fought against academicism and popular taste. That modernism is now institutionalized is a fact of life, which should be accepted, but this does not mean that its battles are over. Insofar as it is institutionalized, it is all the more important that it continue to fight academicism. But to do so by seeking separation from the past only makes it subservient to popular taste, for popular taste always outflanks art in its preoccupation with the new. And when art becomes preoccupied with newness itself, it does not separate itself from popular taste but actually responds to it, especially in traditional media like painting, where a new look is not easily imposed. Hence the way in which some recent art gives the impression of wanting entirely to escape comparison with the great monuments of Western painting and to allow of no appeal except to the localized and transient culture in which it is situated—as is evidenced by the use of terms derived from popular culture, especially popular music, to describe new tendencies in art. Unlike popular music, however, which does not compete with serious music, all contemporary art is finally judged on the same scale and competes for our interest and our approval. The past sets standards that art cannot escape.

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There are no categorical judgments. Valuing comes with the experience of art: one cannot establish rules as to what makes things good or bad. There is some very fine art now being made, and if proportionately there is less good art today than in early modernism, all one can reasonably conclude is that too little art accepts the challenge of the standards of the past at a moment when the modern past itself seems problematic. But there were similar situations in the past, such as in the 1930s through early 1940s. A similar eclecticism, hybridization, and historicism obtained—as did a popularization of the modern in the *moderne*—when the cubist tradition and its geometric and surrealist aspects were waning and combining at the same time. The comparison is not, of course, an exact one (for history does not really repeat itself; it is historians who repeat each other), but it does serve to remind us that modernism has seemed to be in danger of collapse before.

Renewal, it seems, always begins in regression. When modernism recovered in the 1940s, it did so after a primitivist, overtly expressionist interlude. The current popularity of neoexpressionist art suggests an obvious parallel—except that current neoexpressionism appears as an intrinsic part of, not an opposition to, a period of stylistic confusion. It is too early to say whether modernism will recover, or whether it will *need* to recover—and whether *from* or *through* neomodernism. But those who survived the 1930s through early 1940s and renewed and revised modernism—that is to say, the abstract expressionists—did so through a radical act of remembrance: by means of a visionary reconstruction of the past that remade cubism and surrealism in a way that had never existed before. Those who fell by the wayside—and many did, despite what one hears from neomodernist historians—relied merely on memory of the past, and preserved the status quo.

Current neomodernism is to be applauded for refusing to rely on memory: it vigorously opposes repetition of safely established forms. At times, its own visionary reconstructions have been striking, authentic and highly original. But since it all too frequently mistakes citation for remembrance, it tends often to replace repetition by parody, innovation by novelty, and true revision of the past only by revisionism. That modernism is in crisis now is not in question. Memory cannot renew it. Citation cannot revive it. The act of remembrance has always been difficult, and few have the vision it requires.

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FICTION

Harold Brodkey

WHAT GOING OUT WITHOUT ORA IS LIKE: JOHNNO: 1956

A noisy party. Ora has refused to come to it. Erratically a changing group of men plays jazz in one corner of the large loft. A saxophone and drums. A piano. The music was cacophonous with the party noises; and it was discordant, partly, as experiment. That music was the boneyard, the ragshop of some of the art of that period.

Near the door, a larger than life-sized canvas with a blurred portrait of Eisenhower in a toga on it smeared with brown paint that had on it in one corner the letters S H I T. I saw the honesty of it. There was a portrait of the painter's—Bruno Ultto's—psychoanalyst, a woman: she stood naked by her desk looking lost. Her genitals were carefully highlighted. A scribbled portion of the picture was circled with red and in it was inscribed, among other things, C U N T H O M E H O M E O N T H E R A G E.

Johnno was thirty-two, thirty-three. I was twenty-six.

Johnno talked for a moment to a woman painter about Matisse and Picasso, whom he had characterized in a magazine piece that had become fairly well known. He had distinguished them as the idyllic and the enraged. "The topic of the century is rage," he said.

The woman thinks I'm uptown money. She wants me to buy a picture: "I'm doing flowers—"

"*Drenched* with time," Johnno said in a odd, sidelong, salesmanly way.

She said to me in a tough, challenging way, "Hey, those stories of yours make a lot of money."

"Naw. I'm starving."

She made a face.

Editor's Note: A different version of the first part of this excerpt from a novel in progress by Harold Brodkey was published in the anniversary issue of *Partisan Review*, October 1984.

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Bruno Ultto—Johnno had named him; Bruno's real name was Shumler—wore an undershirt and paint-stained white workman's pants. He was playing drums—that was very stylish then, advanced, primitive and advanced.

One of the things I'd told Johnno as we'd walked here was about the depth, the validity of a present moment, even if it's only named as a date, as 1956: "It is when whatever was real *was* real, and undivided, before you were separated from it, from the date, from the moment then, before you could lie about it entirely if you wanted to."

Johnno had tried to tell me his version of that: which was that a poem or a painting must have a real present tense in it: doing it has to be real and present; the artist's life at the moment of making the thing has to be present. He called it The Moment of Action, the blind, sensory, *prior* rush—prior to meaning—prior to the meaning the work might have—and then the judgment: *yes*, *no*, *let it stand*, *do it over* . . .

This is the quality that is perceived as *art*, he said. When there is no such drama, when the thing is rehearsed and known from the start, the thing is memoir, it is merely anecdotal then, it is without value as art.

Johnno can't stand Ora. And Ultto gets upset at the way she refused him. She had dinner with Johnno and me, part of a dinner, and then she went home. She is not considered an artist, and I am.

WHY I AM AN ARTIST: Johnno said, "There is nothing you can be but an artist, so relax and be it."

He meant sleep around, do as I like, despise everyone, develop and display the full reach of my insolence.

I said, "I don't trust myself or what I know."

A PARTIAL PORTRAIT OF JOHNNO:

He was a very good, very interesting poet of the second rank. If you add in his life and his concern for art, he was a poet of major presence.

The thing of being a poet, he used all his time that way. He worked for a salary, ate, slept, telephoned, talked, looked, read, wrote as *a poet* and not as a man or human being or as a faun or boy, either. He led a professional life. It had been self-consciously embarked on, self-consciously announced, self-consciously and expensively carried out. It had a clear madness in it, what he did.

It was rooted in written speech, in words of a special kind, as you might say someone cared about brushstrokes more than about

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colors in nature. He was good at friendship and he had a certain kind of information and influence that no one else had. He had a compacted solidity of purpose, an ability to bear being hated by rivals, by those he thought untalented, by those who refused to live by his discipline and wanted him to be a fool, or to appear to be so, so that they might seem smarter by comparison, he could endure that on top of a great deal of daily and hourly and year-long strain; and this showed in his body, which, although thin, even a little airy, yet had a dense, wide, almost squat quality, compacted, fragile and invulnerable: fragile to special sorts of blows: invulnerable to most blows: therefore, not young.

He wore sneakers, always clean ones. He was short-legged. He walked and sat like a gothic strut or pier, phenomenally erect—that was the determining grotesquery by which you recognized him at a distance. His chest and shoulders and his hands and head were like spreading fans of skinny bone, thinly muscular. The velocity of his will was apparent as an elegant fluster in his voice. Sometimes in his eyes and lips. His movements which were self-conscious and carefully stylish and stylized both—they bordered on cuteness, on extreme miscalculation of effect. His face maintained a deadpan that yet sparked and buzzed with signals—a form of wit. His sensibility, increasingly famous downtown and derided or ignored uptown at that point, was being dulled and coarsened by his *position.* His fame increasingly slowed and dulled the operations of his face; and, in fact, he grew coarse and tough (in a way) and *clever*—that is to say, dishonest. And the quick, semi-anguished face of his youth in its category of amazed and pained beauty, intelligent, luminous, vanished in the purposes and methods and necessities of his being memorable and a star. A worthwhile star. But it became hard to *see* his face except as the methods he used for being impressive and handling things in this framework of being an embattled poet made it visible. Those methods presented it. The techniques he used to live his life obscured him. The methods of presentation of his face, a poet's face, became his face. His physical proportions, fine-drawn in themselves, were thickened by time and impatience, perpetual self-defense, temper, the hardening of the self. The sort of reality, citified, verbally symmetrical, outspread and momentary, that is caused by someone's practice of turning a moment into art (an attempt at comparative eternity) is dirtied and has a kind of jaggedness of being limited to the specific meaning of *this* flight toward art. But art is coarseness and strength then and all sorts of other

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things—in his case, taut and nuanced, androgynous, socially daring, that are perhaps *secondary* in the affairs of the spirit.

The movement of his thought in the backyard part of his mind where sacredness erupts, grew limited and then was hidden from sight except as temperament—he was the mouth of a peculiar, local, harassed god. This was the last year in which his poetry had any quality of freshness but it was the middle of his fecund period. His poetry was good in a final sense for a while longer, harshly technical and pre-set in its failures and its successes.

His mind was pressed forward toward the world in the manner of The Retort.

The animal peculiarity of intelligence in him is a nervous commandingness and courage—the courage is as it was in school. To speak, to be bullied for speech, to persist and *dare.*

Much of his style was taken from his reading. It was stolen but thefts of things devised by others are relationships to others, so that his manner was a scrapbook of affections and invasions. But his sensitivity was suspect as being essentially thievish. That part of his intelligence once devoted to the sacred had long ago become an evolving self-conscious devotion to art at this historical moment—to a now. Around him spreads a horizon of him living and working as he does and of his publicizing himself and others (painters, never writers) and of his particular aspirations, sexual and social, among them to be notable at the party and to impress me.

I have been something of a sexual icon since puberty.

Johnno moves on the floor of the loft to the table which is the bar, above the mocking skuhh and squeak of his sneakers on the wooden floor. The hard-willed and densely armored and pained elegance his eyes have suggest the natural state of the predator. Then the defenseless squeak of his sneakers suggests he is a victim, that he is in himself, an ecological niche alone.

I hear the words, "Macaw, Madam,"—but it is Johnno's pronunciation of *macadam* in the noise of the party. It is the flutter of his lips, a faintly interpolated extra syllable, a pressure: remembering how he talked helps me in reading his poetry sometimes.

His preternatural posture causes his sweater to hang *neatly* from his shoulders. The schooleyness of that—the secular version of a sacerdotal alb quality—is parochial school papal. He consciously felt his youth had been a formal moment subject to being pillaged, violated, sinned against because he had been *beautiful and good*: therefore, to be demeaned. He is of a consequently conscious and

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sophisticated pillaging nature but if I consider the ways in which he violated himself in order to write and to live, and the ways in which he sought violation to establish that he was the curator of a beauty worth attracting the effort to violate it (or possess it), then his being ruthless, his tired mercilessness seems, although shadowed and heritable or inevitable, merely sensible once he managed to enter the life he had entered on so notably.

His walk is American. He has an American gait. His perhaps ill-conceived elegance of person wasn't ill-conceived when you liked his poems. Then he seemed truly interesting. He had *a kind* of erotic authority, a reality of strength and navigation—of accomplishment up to this moment: it was a potent and nervous thing, not second-rate: and that is sort of sexual even if not quite sexual, if I can say it like that.

His head was stonelike on top of the enflamed whatever, the forked pyramid of his body, the living body of what he was in the world of New York art that year—he contained inside his ribs and skull what he knew, two different kinds of things, two absurdly dissimilar kinds of knowledge but related as closely as a mother and a son might be.

He talks to another woman, one who paints dull landscapes now, but who will in ten years time, or thereabouts, be good. She talks. She talks well but whiningly and she does not mean for us to escape her. It is hard to tell what she wants. She's just lonely. Johnno extricates us. And then from a drunken Dutchman who doesn't want to talk, who wants Johnno to talk—he keeps saying, "Johnno, tell me something—tell me something—"

He is large-boned and thick-waisted and thick-armed, but with an uncommon and unexpected (if you went by a first glance) degree of personal beauty. His looks mixed power and loneliness and a workman's naiveté and rage and a very rare fineness, an artist's sad affection and unshared rage and victimization by sensibility and the pain because of shaky procedures for esthetic performance—he had a peculiarly knowledgeable-looking aura of drama and of dullness, I swear it, not dulled, but a kind of physical genius that seemed connected to or even to be a form of, weird saintliness, not expressible.

I mean he was it, he couldn't talk it, he was useless to me in a sense.

Johnno looked like a proud tin cut-out, brightly painted, next to the pale Dutch coloring and dimensionality of the half-inarticulate other man. Johnno had a Harvardish resonating tin *brilliance.*

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Johnno was more martyred than saintly. Still his skull enclosed this stuff, the matter of spirit. His being verbal made him as odd as a pyramid entombing something or other in the middle of a desert. With nervous irony and respect, he moved us away from the experienced (and aging) appetite for talk and the complicated realities of the Dutch painter. Johnno was a star talker as few of the talkative women then in New York were. They were entrepreneurs and mistresses but lesser creators than Johnno—they knew less.

They tended to be ashamed if they admired anything: that was because they were in a bitter competition. Johnno, too, but he was more serious.

They were all drinkers, those women and Johnno and the artists of the time, and dark with prejudice and malice when drunk. Johnno was unmalicious until he was drunk. He would be vengeful and enraged shortly, as he drank more.

In a window near us is a view of lit stretches of darkness, stretches of shifting night-time clouds over mostly dark buildings, torn antimacassars in migration past phallic water tanks. The set of Johnno's eyebrows and their movements above his mouth's squinting semi-foetor and the cording of his neck and the jut of his chin are of someone toughly, staunchly filled with intelligent awareness and thoroughly drunk and on the cusp of malice but he has not yet abandoned the evening's civilized affections.

The broken layers and stepped edges of his awareness are part of his kind of as if moral self-address for a festal occasion.

I helped father the non-abyss part of Johnno's esthetic and I nagged it and advised him on it. The rest of him is him or is him from other sources.

In dreams he can be either a pyramid or a *layered* horse, a wild horse in a movie, running in a limited group of dimensions and overlaid or alternating, as in blinks, with the drawn and painted horses of pictorial art. His look of *wit*, the racing or stalled commentary of someone of publicly acknowledged *wit* is like that: a wildness of temperament but limited in its dimensions and already theatricalized, domesticated; and mixed with references to art. To art and journalism.

In a more personal sense, his eyelids blink less than most people's. The gallows shadow that the genital chance casts is on his staring face. Heat and sexual and intellectual forwardness gust around his mouth. An unexpected aura of cleanliness, something maybe somewhat like a shaved look on a shamed dog, is about him, all of

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him, except his mouth, which is slightedly fetid. And it is *cleanliness* that lurks at the fork of his legs.

His drunken mother comes and goes in him. He has a readiness for visits from phantoms. His body is slowed by air, by reality in a long flinch of suffocation. His head persists in its swiftness, its eyeliddedness and sight. His fretful and combative love for things present in the moment is pitted by a civilized, drunken hatred for the same things.

His packed eyes shift or hold a topic less *educatedly* than when I last saw him and more personally, more maddenedly—drunkenly. He is an optical and ethical and careless device of fame, self-blazing, a light local and perhaps inevitably brief.

"I will live forever."

"Forever in common usage means until one's death, don't you think?"

"I'm an *American* poet—I don't have to think."

He means to correct my style . . . to make his dominant. The pitch of his voice is set by the mannerisms for his style of The Retort.

He and I compete. We show off for one another. I am more famous uptown than he is.

"You work by other methods," I said.

He ignored that.

Sneakers and sweater, brown, straight hair, bare throat, 'intelligent' and a weird look of youth. Naked ankles. Fingery, taut hands.

He doesn't mind it that the first person pronoun is boundless. His life is autobiography in an ironic tone.

He wrote me when I was in college: *In my dreams it is often Cleveland, uncanny Lake Erie. I see myself walking by Lake Eery. It is not what you say it is. It is NOT 'intellect pretending to be physical presence in some sort of model of the day'* I had written him that it was. *It is me, the cocksucker, walking by Lake Eery. Art teaches a person how to see his own dreams. You said you feel your face as a watery nothing. Well, tant pis if you want. I am as beautiful as ever. I AM everything possible—this very serious. I am a living God.* He was younger then.

I'll say that for me the governing mode of his poetry is the child bliss in offering the captured creature, the poem. It wasn't a cat's long-backed swagger of capture: success in capture was sweet for him. He was drawn to sweetness in art although no one ever pointed it out. When seriousness was at too continuous a pitch, he pushed clear from it as a child might push his mother's hands from him.

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Everyone knows he is partly mad and is getting worse but no one does anything about it. Daily pain and the recognition of death as a positive appetite is what he is a master of in life and this doesn't often show in his work but only the capture of the poem, as I said.

Sexually, the search for extreme and justified presence ties him to vileness of a sort. By justified I mean within a frame of purpose, of dailiness. By presence I mean something as suffocating and primitively Christian as marriage: he was sacramentally tied to his actions. I respected what he did because he knew so much—I am not a moral man, this means.

For him, sexually, as in poetry (and in painting) when the words were okay, it was felicity for a while.

We went and sat on the landing of some homemade steps, painted white. The paint had worn off in large irregular patches where feet usually walked. Some of the oddity of how we talked at first was because the noise of the party and the number of people there stirred us—I had party nerves and Johnno had his version of that, except that it was a more familiar habitat to him—and us trying to negotiate something or other, a professional alliance perhaps, or an occasion of talk that would be useful, that would wind up inside the work, and on his part a seduction, sexual or romantic or habitual: it went like this:

"That man with the noble eyes and the beard—" It was a sort of question; it was open-ended in inflection and purpose: a verbal noise. Johnno could have said *a painter* or he could have said, *I suppose you like baseball.* It meant my mind was open—and had words in it.

We did not often ask, or answer each other when asked, a direct question—the aspect of confrontation in it was too primitive and too passionate, suggesting jealousy and revealing too many secrets. It centered on power and evasiveness. We side-stepped philistine investigation.

"Oh: René, Hothkot—*he's* a genius—" Half an exclamation point. *Genius* was a specific rank and a specific kind of talent, below *great* and often less than merely the term, *poet* or *painter* or whatever—I mean in my terms. Or in Johnno's. I don't know who originated what.

"As in second-rate mystic?" The man had a kind of stooped sadness but a face of displayed and gently combative revelation.

"He just happens to be the best religious painter since Rembrandt," Johnno said, being careless and extravagant, partly as public relations for the man—Johnno's eminence came from his do-

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ing such favors, from selling pictures—and being drunk: I mean making a signal of how freely he intended to speak, how much less socially than at dinner.

At dinner he had gradually gotten drunken and extravagant, so Ora had left. Then he sobered some and with coffee more but, essentially, he accepted only such social discipline in my presence as he felt constrained to by my taste and his courtship posture of sorts and a certain respect for my work. Our arrangement, our agreement was that he liked my work somewhat more than I liked his.

"No kidding? Rembrandt—"

"He does light the way Rembrandt puts Jesus or Susannah right in your own backyard—"

"Just light? Or is it the backyard, too: he does Jesus locally?"

"It's very important work. His canvases should have been what was handed down on Sinai: we don't need all those rules that no one does—"

"*Moses* Hothkot—"

"He doesn't tell people they shouldn't lie: what else are they going to do: confess *everything* to *everyone*?"

At dinner I'd argued that lying killed one's consciousness of things, that lying produced a willed consciousness, not a receptive one, and that it made friendship wearing.

"The way *you* lie *is* appalling, Johnno—"

"I don't know if I think your commandments are fun."

"I don't know that that matters."

"A pretty policeman and his toy laws . . ." Johnno was disgruntled.

"Johnno, a law of consciousness *might* be beyond *opinion*—"

"Not my opinion."

"Do you ever have a moment of—I don't know—a return to Sunday School—you didn't have Sunday School—to catechism class—to a feeling there are laws, not the laws signified here, I mean these were images of actual laws of consciousness—or of success—or of *something* like that?"

"No. Do you?"

He was almost at the end of the sober part of the evening, at the end of listening to me and of responding. The messy part was about to begin.

But maybe we had a few minutes to go—or I could extend them a little. "No. But almost. I think God is silent. I think God is always silent—"

"Well, then, it hardly matters about *him*, does it?"

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"I don't know, Johnno: put someone silent onstage, with his back to the audience, and to the other characters, and let the play run along, and in no time you'll see: the audience will begin to focus on him, it'll start to wait mainly for *him* to do something, to speak: the meanings slowly kind of seem to come to rest in *him*—that's one of the tricks of language."

Johnno said, "Oh, you do religion by *analogy*. All that hocus-pocus about God is just saying shit to the world—" That was actually a question. We half-shared a notion that you replaced an emotional or religious law with an esthetic one usually, that freedom lay in exchanging laws at your will, and not in an escape from law.

Or I thought that and he uneasily went along with it in part but largely disagreed.

"I thought you admired religion; didn't you just praise Hothkot for being religious?"

"He's interesting when he's religious, *he's* a *religious artist* . . . he does it where you can see it."

"You mean he goes to bed with you?"

"Yes." Then: "Friends are friends."

Pause. "Tell me—I mean, how does it *happen*?"

"I look at his pictures and I am carried away and then I say Let me do you and he lets down his pants—we're friends—"

Pause. "You're an esthetic bigot—"

"That means *I'm* an artist—"

An implication here is that the woman I live with is bad for my *art*—I mean it was a kind of fidelity to her that kept me from being free—or more free, anyway. He says, implies, feels that she's crass and extravagant, possessive; she doesn't understand the ideas or the function of the kinds of things *art* asks you to do or be: this is partly his real opinion but it's also a style, to accuse a woman of that.

"I don't want to be an artist—yet—" I don't want to be influenced by such styles; I didn't want at that time to be an embattled speaker for what I really felt . . .

"That's crazy—" Dulled tin inflection, a downward inflection.

"I want to live like everyone else—"

"To live like everyone else is *very* boring." He looked me in the eye.

With Johnno, I am less cautious and more pretentious in argument than I am with anyone else: he is a representative figure for me. He represents a range of sensibility I don't have.

Johnno's method of seduction is a common one in New York

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among successful people: he is in love with everyone he likes or wants, he loves with varying degrees of sincerity; and then he talks. I was being chased at that time by nearly everyone but idly, almost as a tic: it came about because I was attached to Ora: everyone wanted to measure themselves against a beautiful and fairly brainy girl—I mean they sort of said so.

Now he looks as if the occasion is on trial, as if he were in bitter pain, as if I might bore him. He is bringing to bear a kind of pressure: his suffering—my philistinism.

Socially, I'm relaxed outwardly. One problem in New York is that I'm largish; and most of the people in my field are smaller, are Napoleonic. My *size* suggests that I'm an outsider, a football player who writes—a sexual icon. Inwardly I'm *working*, trying to improvise a thing between Johnno and me, a talk, let's call it *A Talk*: I want to make my waking up tomorrow unscalding.

I am also vaguely hallucinatory. I see ghosts, of other occasions, of stories from life, of stories from books.

And I see signs in people's faces, early death, that kind of thing. Pain, ambition, exhibitionism. Raw-nerved, drunk, personal power, crazedness—not joke forms—not sexually impressive in Johnno. I mean, not stuff I want to embrace—*sexually* . . .

"Johnno, I want to ask a question: don't you ever want to be *careful* about—your feelings?"

"No. You have the terrible habit of good-looking people who like to refuse to flirt when they know they should. Because their hearts are on fire."

"People still use that word, *flirt*? You're better looking than I am, Johnno . . ." Defeat. Defeated trickery.

"I am very beautiful; and it's time you said so."

I took a sad breath while he eyed me from a face, tilted, spilled—pain spilled from it—yet, it seemed unspilled in any real way.

"I doubt that ambition can be *really* sexual," I said. "*You* know about love and death—" I held his glance and said, "Don't you?" He didn't answer. "If you're ambitious, you build up a debt to death, to strong feeling—"

"Oh I hate all that *Death in Venice* crap. It's not true. See that pretty blond boy over there?"

"The pudgy one with the dumb mouth?"

"That's not a *dumb* mouth, that's a great mouth of the fifties, that mouth makes love like a wet fur teacup." Johnno still had some

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leftover stuff from the time he had been an apprentice *Surrealist.* He had been sedulous toward every esthetic movement since 1880—from his reading. "That mouth and that boy have *great* charm, and he is ambition itself."

I am always nonplussed and put into something like a state of jealous agony by the thing in someone of being sexually alive to everyone. I can't do it. It seems related to the thing of constant triumph, urban grace, the ego's wish.

"He has no charm at all that I can see; he's dreary-looking."

"A lot you know! He is PARADISE!" His voice is passionate and driven in a high-pitched, struck tin way on certain notes. Then: "You're lying, you're hot for him yourself." I shrugged. He said, "I'm a great poet and a great beauty; I hate the middle class. And you are great, you are a great, great writer—" That's a specific category of talent for him as I said earlier: it means having the ability to be a definitive creator, an inventor: it has a spiritual overtone and it is a lesser rank than being *a writer*: Joyce was *a writer*; or if Johnno was ladling out terms, Joyce was *very, very, very, very great.* 'Great, great' meant he had to go to bed with me, I was so good, he had to get his arms around *it*, the giftedness, as with Hothkot, or *me* a term to be substituted for *it.* He said, "But you're ignorant." Pause. "You need to have your heart broken."

"I can see *leaving* the middle class but I can't see that condemning it automatically is intelligent: given a vote, it is what nearly everyone wants to be—as well as an artist." Then vanity—and loneliness—shook me and loosened my pride. I asked, "How am I great?"

"You are very good about lawns and porches. You know you are in love with me, you're too dishonest, you're too scared TO ADMIT IT—"

I said nothing at first. Then I said, "I love you, Johnno, you know that." That is, tell me about me.

He said, "I am a great genius, and you don't know it, but you will, you will know how much you loved me."

In his story, one that he would write, that he would feel describes what he feels well enough, I, Wiley, I am a vortex of beauty of a kind and a rock in my nature, in my freedom so that he capsizes and suffers near whatever he chooses to do.

I am Scylla *and* Charybdis in the story of Johnno-Ulysses and nothing admirable at all unless I become the spirit of a favoring wind.

Or, he might re-create me as the one-eyed giant, a monster,

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and make up the elements of truth, a fiction, a set of images; or have me be a frightened love-slave.

He would Judaize the image and have it grotesque, in part: the maw into which he falls. He cannot grant a pluralism.

Here are three words I know now that I didn't know then: *deracinated Yeshiva bocher.*

Here are three more: *middlewestern*, *Harvard*, *New York*; each survived in me to an extent such that I was not deracinated enough, not Yeshiva enough, not *bocher* enough to enter Johnno's world and be a character in flight in it, defined and final, that audacity of voice symbolizing itself in semi-abstract swirls of definition, in order to be final, for the sake of work and of identification and of adventures—so to speak.

In those ways I was not as freed as he was and or as battered in my freedom. He was consigned to outrage—in an Irish-American, ex-Catholic tone—as *an artist in New York City*—I am, by comparison, unsynopsized, less serious in terms of translating myself into being a man of letters and made of lines and more lines, perhaps more gifted than his, perhaps less.

And the comparative rank mattered because you know yourself, and others, by comparison. Also, it measured truth and generosity, as comparatives. I distrust his rank as a poet because he is a poet of bardic will who celebrates ego and pain in a way I invented for Americans but he has made it have a meaning I disapprove of. He still says he got it from me but he would deny it if I were less well known. He switched from being like the writers of the thirties, he switched from Eliot to Stevens and then to me, but he did what I did but he did it differently, metaphysically, with finality, without contingency: he did it as fate. The urban or surburban day, a man inside a given moment without beliefs and with only the facts of surface to indicate the presence of fragile meaning in a given destiny. Pathos. Perhaps *greatness* as an artist, with finality. I *feel* that he is good but I am uneasy with what he has accomplished, I am reluctant to love it—to have it matter greatly to me. That is, I think it is wrong-headed—too staccato and without sufficient truth. But it is lovely. He is *amusing* in the existential vacuum he proposes —this is like Picasso. It is less a world-pose than that man's is—Johnno is incompletely defined as a figure. That is, he is as journalistic as Picasso but it is a local journalism—as if for a local paper. He is rooted in a crevice that is not overshone by the artists of the generation before us.

But at the same time, Johnno's work is an act of individual

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character and it has in it an extraordinary voice, articulate and pungent, whining and sharp. A man or woman can choose any frame of belief he or she wants to now but Johnno warmly, implicitly rejects that as isolation and argues over and over that life has to be communal—and esthetic—and *friendly*. An esthetic basis for a politics. An authentic basis, too. He is quite wonderful. That means I think his work is terrific.

But I can't embrace it.

For one thing, his sense of things concerns another history of God from the one I know. His sense of God has in it a sense of a voice among pagans, bringing light, a sense of multiple presences, then a sense of grieving outrage at the heart of the story, at the heart of his poetry—the lamentable image, the truth, for him, the crucifixion. Mine has at its center a sense of contract and of proof—I am closer to Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence than I am to Irish visionarydom.

And I am four or five inches taller and twenty-five pounds larger.

Johnno's sense of me as foreign in various ways and as an oppressor and enemy, as causing him to be violent and quick, I could see that then and I see it now.

But that I existed too was beyond him and almost beyond me—except as a kind of obstinacy of style: a sort of slow-motion tantrum.

I said, "But I *do* love you, Johnno." The tones of my voice shape the meaning *my* way but not just malely but with some esthetic authority as well.

He said, "I'm too much for you."

In those days I never boasted except to Johnno. I said, "How many people do you think say that to me in the course of a month?"

Meaning how many people made approaches and then threats of that sort or worse.

His head jerked: it jolted him, the idea and then *the facts* of my physical existence.

"You love me! You know that you love me! Why do you look at me the way you do! That's hunger. Why do you talk to me?"

"Because I want to. If I say something to you about Valéry, you'll *talk*—you're almost the only one. Everyone else just sits tight, on their secrets, and doles out a little bit of useful talk now and then—"

He said, scornfully, "Casanova—" Then: "I'm irresistible."

I said, "That's how it happens, with me anyway. I'd really like to have it explained to me." Then, giving up: "Tell me, do you think Valéry *really* was a great mind?"

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That is, did we have to love Valéry too?

Johnno said, "I'm tired of Valéry."

"What a relief." I murmured that.

Then he said, gesturing, "He thinks art has two—kinds—of falsification in it, embellishment and trying to reproduce the real." Then he looked at me.

I said, "He can't mean that. What was it in French?"

Johnno spoke the remark in French, probably with mistakes, but how could I tell? I repeated his French. I had some idea of a sense of it—the sense I made of it, although not necessarily reproduced from Johnno or the original.

He said, not quite amused, "Your French is savage—"

"Ah well: that's Miss Foxberg, Pauline, she was a judge's daughter, Jewish, she had a mustache. She preferred the French in all their ways to the English: hairy women: that was a political position back home: Missouri: Miss Foxberg used to *wound* her Gentile colleagues in the high school who were hot for England by denouncing England as uncivilized and crass: Kipling, she said, was *not* Rostand. And the Anglophiles would bridle and feel unfit to answer except to refer to stately homes and the English navy. And to looks. She was tremendously ugly, short and fat. She always had a young man in attendance, a school officer with ambitions to go to some school such as Princeton; he was to act as her chauffeur in return for lessons in *la langue Française*; but she was a lesbian: I believe she liked only Frenchwomen. She thought Baudelaire was impossible: the sense of sin or her own longing for a mulatto whore—do you believe in sin?"

"There is no sin. It's *vieux jeux.*"

"Imagine: you're so at home in culture, in a Boston Irish way, imagine being freed from commandment like you, Johnno: *vieux jeux*, view the Jew."

"You're not a Jew."

"What am I?"

"An imaginative artist, like me."

"Aren't you the silly one," I said. "Personality has to have some foundation. You're just scared to believe we're only people. Well, listen—" I was prepared now to try to deal with the Valéry quote: "Eyes are an embellishment of the face: they're not falsifications either; they're eyes—that needn't be *construed* as *more* than embellishment if the word isn't being attacked. *Embellishments* don't *have* to be attacked, do you know? And the real is all there is—it is the only thing that is represented—someone pretending to be talking of

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something unreal: I don't think anyone reads the unreal part. If you *could* reproduce the real it would stun you but he means a piece of an artifact falsifies the real if it pretends to be real people or a real flower but that just means that art has to be open about itself. He doesn't mean strenuous distortions—like the love life of wrought-iron fences on Antares."

"You're *very* impressive when you talk about that mad mad high school you went to, you are so good on America, we all come out from under your cloak, but I must say I wish you wouldn't *think*. You have shown us all how to be honestly here on a side street, you mad lantern of a boy, but you know nothing of the glory that is rational thought. You are a fine, fine artist but you are not a prince of culture yet. When will you say you love me: I know you love me, when will you stop lying about it, you are not sincere about *anything*—"

That perpetual horniness for love is what ambitious people have, when sex for them depends on words. It is a super pattern of words they are looking for. And they think their rank entitles them to love, that *words* can command it—perhaps they can. The descriptions in the future of what he did now were the true objects of Johnno's appetites; he was nervous and wolfish toward life—and a great figure in it. He meant something in what he was, mistakes, too, and abilities: I saw that. But he was intent on being *a great poet* and that was something else: he might be it and I would not see it. His tongue was the sexual organ of his sensibility: I don't believe his body existed as truth. He fathered truth, love affairs, poems with his tongue. The degree of blasphemy in him made his poems bastards but less so each year. They were beginning to form a biography that suggested something bad enough that it was like jaws built around a disembodied tongue pronouncing a judgment of pathos and hurt.

I said, dodging my sense of the above: "The tongue is shaped like the letter *I*, capital, or *i*, small—a flick of sound flying from its tip." I wanted to bribe him with a little dirty talk. It was pretty silly.

"Oh you are a policeman, a Yid policeman, I *love* your meanness." His voice was inflected, wry, acidic, taut. It trembled with constant intelligence turned into judgment: speculative judgment, gambles on meanings as investments. "You have a chin like Garbo's."

"I do not."

"You hate wit. You are John Wayne. Except when you think no one is looking: then your face shows you to be the real Sarah Bernhardt." Pause. "Wit is not an Old Testament trait."

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John Wayne—the Woman Bernhardt—a Jew.

I said, "The best thing about you is that your stupidity is occasionally intelligent."

He ignored that. He said, delirious with a kind of malice so complexly toned with wish and feeling and no-feeling that it stung me more to know he had such feelings than that he was attacking me in this way: "Bernhardt and Crawford—Joan—that's you, your thighs have a flutter of lust just like Crawford's in her fuck-me shoes, I am a great poet whether you know it or not."

He was, sort of. But mostly not. I was safe from envy in a Jewish thing having to do with Jews and *thought*, I guess. I didn't think of it as a Jewish thing. I can see he might have felt it in me as something detestable or sexual or appealing, my sense of my own power, of being ultimately a better artist than he was.

But I couldn't prove it. And suddenly I was—inwardly—shaken. He displayed his feelings as a form of showing he had a human power, pretty much saying, All right, now let's see *your* romantic depths. And your erotic reach. Your human depth of charity, how much right one had to be loved now, and historically as someone with the soul of a large-souled artist.

If I thought of myself with Ora, I was consoled if I thought without thinking, but when I remembered more about us, I shivered and wondered. And my stories so far, I mistrusted because part of the structuring of them had been to hide my sense of tragedy, to be a young voice interchangeable with others—the communal thing, maybe falsified by my being a Jew or something: I wasn't sure.

It was intelligent and rending of him to do what he did but it was *rehearsed* and polished.

The momentum of one's rebellion then, against *him*, propels one into a heartlessness that causes anguish, let's say, assuming he cares. I have to be modest and I have to be shrewd—he liked so many people. But in the stance of art, something else occurs: Johnno wanted me a lot: obsessively.

He was himself and he was an esthetic construct and he was an imitation (and a rival) of his drunken mother. He said once, *I hate it that I realize I am dragging her into art.* He used talk as someone else might use muscle or skin—as a physical lure. Johnno's sense of sexual drama was secularized holiness, himself as Pope and others as brigands raping the Holy See, sadism and command, the heartless and unspiritual others. I am the Jew Genius Big-Bodied Outlaw.

"You love me," he said.

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"No."

It was merely honesty.

I take that back. I was watching, openly and secretly both, actually as I had in reform temple when I was a boy, to see what light showed here. My curiosity is about revelation, his emotions, the world of others . . .

"You are a dumb bastard." Johnno said loftily-meanly—and hurt—and piqued and interested, anguished and infatuated—I felt a flicker of sexuality at my power and then a longer flicker of shame—a coldness succeeded it.

"The mind is weird, it's a skull mounted on shoulders, *geist* on an ox, the ox, the body has a separate thing—consciousness of its own. My body thinks and has a will. If I tried to be a poet, Johnno, I would have to mortify my body which otherwise would assert that mind of its own. A Jew-mind starts by ignoring the body, sort of anyway. The forepart of the mind, where the windows are and quickness is, belongs to the body anyway." I was not clear: I was intense. "That's where you are. That part of the mind is absorbed into flesh, I think. Into the dumb, laboring parts. My mind is in the backyard, looking through the house—the body—to the front porch. Johnno, why should I attempt mortification for you, *art* demands no such thing, it's just you."

"It's where real feeling is."

What he wouldn't do was to grant reality any basis of its own; he had the right to define it; he had usurped that right from Nature—he was an *artist.*

"No one should howl except an animal," I said.

He wasn't insulted—at least outwardly. My voice had been neutrally cold enough to protect him some.

It was an odd accusation for me to make since I held the thought that art had to have an animal sense.

His ambition, our ugliness, his interest in me, my cruelty, made him stink with nerves.

He thought I was tough.

Pain made him taut and dominating. It was his pain that gave him his energy. He assumed pain as I assumed my right to freedom from it at least part of the time.

"You always love the wrong people, you only love idols, gods," he said: that was smart-assed of him, smart, stinging—true enough. But he became wet-eyed in the wooden battering of *his* knowledge of things, including him and me—and our lives in the world; ah: in

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New York: he said, "You will know how wrong you are when I die." I started to grin stonily, agonizedly—nervously—at the motheryness of that, at the reminder of death, at the reminder of how much he wanted to hurt me to make me come to life his way and love him his way; he said, "You're the pervert: *they* will say of you, Isn't it too bad his love was *never* blind."

He meant I *loved*, was infatuated, had affairs in ways that weren't concerned with the tormenting puzzles of loving someone like Johnno and his sense of things, his sense of the era—and of truth . . .

"Johnno, I think you're terrific—"

His was a complex ambition which in some senses included me: "Everyone intelligent is interested in you—or in love," he said, making an accusation like that of being like *The Times* or like being a policeman. As someone else might say, *You're obvious.*

It was true in a limited sense: I was in style in that way among certain people, so that it was part of daily reality, people competing for me as well as with me and trying to get my attention—and the rest of me—but not caring very much about having me except as subject matter, the subject being my disappointing them then, too—I'm just guessing about that. The area of sincerity toward me within the Zeus-cloud of his ambition was private, was individual towards me in a way; but that part of him seemed all pain and general and to be not concerned with me but with pain and very limited self-sacrifice in terms of only at certain fixed hours of the day but limitless in the sense of choosing his notions over the old sacraments. He had a kind of sea gull quality of an implication of immanent outcries at being abandoned.

"They can all be in love with you—but you are in love with me—" He leaped blindly into his own silent speech, the phrases of possible poems; I saw it in his face, the velocity and foreshortening that that mental distancing imposed on things he did. He expressed a sort of truth—he thought this was intense life—the realest life—and intensity, the one that famous poets had.

And his touch, so childlike, felt like the curled points of dead leaves—the dryness of the ambition.

I laughed: I always do when I am admired—I'm sort of fatuous. It didn't matter how he said it. He laughed because I did, with shock and closeness, closeness to a story about me—or closeness to a story about love and him and maybe me; and then he sort of went, "Ha, ha," he laughed differently as a device to be distant. His laugh got to

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be sad, acid, cutting, ready to be *seen* in a poem—he didn't want to be *friends*: I mean in the childhood or grownup sense.

He was scared of that—and as bored by it—as I was by the unsymmetrically huge drama of his psychic damnation.

I said, "I used to blame myself for being young: now, I'm ashamed because of it, which is an improvement."

"You don't seem young," he said, heavy and somber with vision and violation, like a lead idol. He partly understood what I meant, which was very exciting of him. It's dull to be misunderstood.

"That is very oracular, Johnno." He didn't recognize the long word until I offered it again: "Oracular."

"You're immensely old," he said like an interviewer.

"I suppose I'm not young—how would I know?"

He said, "You are jealous of me, you hate me because I'm better than you." His hand lifted from my arm, wavered, descended.

"It's possible."

"My feelings are precious."

"Widely publicized, anyway."

"What makes you so harsh?"

"I don't see the point of getting entangled in obvious pain of a certain kind for the sake of being in a poem."

"Certain kind?"

"Chic pain—thoroughly escapable—I don't want it."

"I am not chic," he said, half-outraged, superior, justifiably so. My saying *chic* was philistine and stupid and bullying.

But he, having seen yet again, the eighteenth man that day, who was his heart's wish, but maybe differently in my case and maybe not differently at all, or not of importance but of a categorical kind, his ambition's consort, became wrongfully *tragic* now. He was crazy and violent with unnecessary angry loneliness. He had a choice after all: he was hardly helpless. The precedence he gave his hurt ruined his life. My life consists of study. Consciously. Study is profoundly sad, even deadly, but it does not have in it envy and anguish *necessarily*. And it is not lonely in the usual ways.

Johnno blew up at me: "You're crazy, you refuse to live, I know what life is. You should fuck me."

I moved my arm away from him. His face was contorted: his mouth dribbled. His pain was the issue, and my stupidity about the adventuresomeness to be expected of me, some physical rubbing or rubbing up against, some boastfulness about, oh, the history of the skin, some real perception of what life was like, the quasi-incest in

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the family of poets, the ache in the mind, the physical shame of the loss of the outward self, and what was done in the way of momentary cure, not feelingly so much as in the way of list-making but hungrily. I, for instance, talking like this—with someone bright and dangerous—tended to become almost a conscious gyroscope inside a restlessly physical frame of a less intelligible state of mind than that of talking to him. Ora and I could only rarely talk in this way and not for long just as we could never dance together because of the physical intimacy and glances or no-glances and the immediacy of the other drama of whether and in what ways the other was there. The vast gymnastic routines—somersaults, twists and turns, cartwheels and leaps—of the person and his mind and body to live in an enlarged world, money and numbers, and the democratic humors of complicity and physical warmth of some kind—you might say the near impossibility of personal virginity—and the absence of any longing for it in most people—the agonized and usually drunken sophistication of this stuff was beyond my reach: you have to prepare your mind and body—and spirit—you have to have the humility and drive and physical complicity in life itself among people of one approach or the sado-masochistic snobbery and being beaten down and grovelling and defiance and lying and cheating of another approach or a grandeur of saying no but of acknowledging it as a no.

It's not a matter of potency. The way the lies work and the relief when someone climbs into bed with you when you've spent years inside your head and your body is a little musty, like an attic, even if you've been fucking around, and someone embraces your crookedness and your professional errors and all the events, only half-known by your own mind, by your own soul, is such that an impotent but agreeable man, like a frigid but brilliant-talking woman is considered to be, and is, under the circumstances, *a great lover* . . . I never had that title . . .

"I'm no good in bed."

"That's a stupid thing to say."

I only had to let him touch me: he did not mean anything in the range of response—contempt, despair, shame—anything.

Plus he inferred or *knew* from my few love affairs and a time at the beginning when I had been, not quite willingly, inside the human grouping I described above, and had wanted Johnno to know he didn't disgust me.

"I'm no good in bed under these circumstances, Johnno."

"You got it up for me once," he said.

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It startled me when he misunderstood what I said—even that he would do it for a purpose. The fact that we could talk, topic by topic, with considerable rationality and, if I may, thematic coherence, seemed to me to be more dramatically valuable than getting our own ways—it was more important than asking favors of him or him asking or pushing this.

But as soon as he crossed the line into playing-this-sort-of-game—I mean if friendship such as it was, was no good, and the talk was no good, if he couldn't paw me—then, without thinking further about it, I felt strongly that I could ask things.

I mean, suddenly we were in the bazaar and were haggling: "What is it about me that you like—my long legs, my calm, unbegging eyes—my nervous pimples?"

I liked to have myself explained. And I'd found, after watching others pull this maneuver, that asking about yourself in this way destroyed the sexual texture of the scene; the drama of the other person's advances, his or her sense of that drama, wound down into gossip: a kind of folly. No one wanted a narcissist: no one was devoted outward, only to what might be directed toward herself, toward himself.

He scowled, self-conscious, dense, packed with momentums briefly stilled: a kennelled nervousness: a dry electric buzz, a complex fear of me, partly male fear of another man—(that was what excited him)—and partly fear of what I might be able to say. He was hard-bodied, clever and intent, and cold and passionate: strongly nostalgic. He said, "You deserve it, for me to ignore you."

"I am in love at the moment, Johnno, and it's with Ora, and I really don't want to do this." Then: "You are a real son of a bitch to do this—this stuff *hurts ME*, Johnno—it is IMPOSSIBLE—"

"You don't know what you want—you're a middle-class snob."

"I want less suffering than this and less—dirtiness—"

He said—derisively—"The filth—it's you, it's in your blood, that filth: the ordinary is worse filth and your lies are worse and you know it. Love is *never* filth."

Deadpan mockery: "Is that true? Is that really true? How many people do you expect me to be in love with at one time?"

"You lie about that," Johnno said with contempt.

Indeed, Ora made me angry enough and I got scared enough—about things—that I did cheat on her: it was an odd business: the whole thing with Ora and me was taut and intense and crazed—and feverish. As a matter of course, when I was pissed with Ora or

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scared, and I saw Johnno, I did consider Johnno physically—I felt a faint stir when I first saw him or in the first moments after Ora left the table this evening.

But it didn't last. Some sort of wall arose.

His emancipation, I'll call it that, led into conceit, a drunken conceit, a rigid pattern: grimness in pleasure and vivacity in pain: he had a handsome unhappiness: part of it was well-rehearsed (or famous) hatred—a puritan-unpuritan thing.

But how many people are interesting company for any one person? What will you do in the face of someone else's will if they keep you from feeling lonely?

Johnno said, "Bruno is the best lover in the world: he is a great artist—it is Paradise—"

"Outré paradise," I said, as if idly, glancing around with a superiority that was tactical in nature: it was not what I felt. I mean, Johnno's speech worked even if it was obvious; it did make me uneasily *jealous*. Ora and I weren't *paradise*. (She said we were—maybe we were but how could you tell? She said, *Just look at other people* but I didn't feel superior to Johnno's life; I just didn't want to go to bed with him, I really didn't want to. To be honest, I wanted to want to, and I tried to drum up some *good nature* or whatever it should be called, some bodily readiness to be fondled, some sense of poetic and extremely public nakedness as either delicious or as a dirty and sought after fate.) "I am not physically friendly, Johnno. I don't comfort anyone with *my body*." That just wasn't true: if you're big, you do it all the time, with strangers going through a doorway at the same time you are: a kind of species courtesy.

I meant sexually—I meant I couldn't comfort even myself with my own body: I meant that what my body was for sexually was to entice comfort for itself.

Johnno was staring at me, then at the air, and smoking, and his disdain for the lie was so palpable to me, so shaming, that I said, "I am already in *love* with someone."

"Fuck that. Fuck her."

"You're a mess, Johnno—"

"You're lying about your feelings—"

"Not by very much—"

"You should leave that bitch with her big tits and come down here to live: you're an artist."

The price of Ora. The price of the moments with Ora.

"She doesn't have big tits. Pipsqueak. What happens to the

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mind down here, to all these artists, is just too strange. I'm scared of it—trademarked one-noters. Or take your sort of courtship: you silence somebody, a man or a woman as if they were kids; then you can look at them at your leisure; you can make them pay attention to implications; and if they want to speak, they have to speak physically, that's the only way they can speak and have you listen to them."

For the moment, in the arc of his drinking, he was tensely *sincere*: "Everything is dead except down here."

But fear, but doubt, but the same sort of provincial half-fanatic concern for doctrine of his childhood Catholicism—the cruelty, or anger, they're the same thing, just as rivalry and cruelty and treachery are the same things, that stuff in me was eased at seeing the Catholic frightened of Hell in Johnno, the inflexibility of mind inside, or alongside, the cleverness, the stultified vision, censored by hysteria. "Johnno, when someone is really sincere—" (I assumed he had heard his own voice, his hysteria) "—the mind closes down—feelings take over. This part of the world is dead, too. This is a Reno. I mean a gambling place—a dead casino. One of those. And making sense in words means things aren't exciting really: they're just tense—or you wouldn't be able to make sense yet, not much anyway, unless you were inspired, of course—"

"I *am* inspired—"

"It can only very rarely be sincere to speak with feeling, to make sense and to have feelings. Most of the time we aren't going to let go of what we are, of what we've learned—we're implicated in the game of getting along—so what feelings are possible down here either—tell me one thing, is it *heartbreaking*?" Here, I meant.

"No," he said. "Yes. It doesn't matter. I matter."

"If things aren't hard to remember as they happen, then they're a sort of skillful trespass; they're calculated. I *hate* being made a fool of, Johnno. When you're running or when you're about to touch someone, doesn't your mind go dark for a second or two? If you're in control, it's not really happening. Or if you retreat entirely into yourself. And a thing not-happening is not a neutral thing: it kills an area of the consciousness. If what you're doing is really a commentary on the act, then it's what you know but it's not the thing. To live means the world has its way with you. The animal haze of action, I have that in only a few things, and only sometimes. Mostly I just—never mind. The higher the velocity, the more everything flies off the face of the earth and becomes abstract and sort of falsely pure—then it's *a ghost*—"

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"You don't talk like *a person*," he said.

"That's so. I don't talk like a person. But, Johnno, listen: part of what is between us when we talk are our physical differences: I live inside a body and feelings and sensations that are mostly unlike yours all the time, and you think they're mistaken ones, fascist . . ." He shook his head, *no, no, no.* "This is hard to think about: I want to believe people are alike, that I share things with everyone, the same evidence of the world. I do and I don't. Mostly I'm not typical. Well, listen, I think you are fabulously wrong, too. When you think you're being impressive, I think you're too jittery, too beset . . . Come on, tell me, Johnno, are there really any good *poems* about sexual *contentment*, Johnno?"

He said, "No, there are only my tears which I am going to send to the Vatican for safekeeping and perhaps for display in the Borgia apartments. Or the Raphael *stanze.*"

In those days I talked more elaborately than I wrote; I gave myself up to it—to talking. I used him, he was the occasion for some suicidal flights in which I found out what I thought. "Is it an architectural or is it a watery sense of *things* that you get through your tears? When you're in tears, do you see everything as an architecture of water? Is it more like Hokusai or hocus-pocus—"

"I may use 'architecture of water'."

"I'll make you a gift of it. To make up for other things."

"I won't take it as a gift, if you don't mind. I'll just take it." He was half-snide—half-stilled which is to say half pure listener for a moment. He meant a good poet steals. T. S. Eliot had said that. I smiled at him and he burst out: "You are only a dirty picture but I am important."

He had feelings, you see, where I had none. And he was oppressed by the fight of language and rivalrous—and maybe he was aroused by it—and he was half not-listening so he could steal and not be oppressed. But he was special because of the way he added, "But you are a very, very important writer."

I was drunk, and—I don't need to tell you—I was stupid: I sang, "'Somewhere, under the Rimbaud.'"

"Ran-boh," he mocked. "Listen, don't ever masturbate, don't ever even touch your prick, just remember there are others who need it: others need your nice cock more than you do."

"That's a nice thought," I said startled. "Is it true?" I blinked. "Maybe that thought will change my life."

"You're naive. You know nothing," he said, drunkenly acidulous

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because I was interested in it as a notion and not as something enducing an immediate kiss. That was an injustice, some error was heavily here: "If you were an honest man, you would kiss me in front of everyone." I felt a smart man would have known what to do or say but I didn't and, so, I was quiet, a little stiff and angry, though. He said, "You don't love that bitch, you're about as hetero as a toe slipper: all your dreams are about cock—you dream of *me.*" He had become greenish with tiredness and booze. His eyes were distorted. The almost supernatural noise of the party dinned and banged at me but he seemed unmoved—leaden-eared, leaden-nerved. "You love me: you don't want to be happy, you're a Jew. I know what I'm saying—I'm a love poet. I know what love is backwards and forwards." He paused, he gazed for me to get it. He said it before to people. "Your come was so thick, it choked me: I know what that means."

I said, "Oh shit, you're being crazy again. You're making stuff up, Johnno. You're playing dumb games." That last phrase was kind of a newish statement that year and had almost a street intensity.

"No, *I'm* honest," he said in a flat, dense voice, compacted now with hysterical drunkenness—and with feeling that I felt was merely will, that I felt like a bludgeoning from the wings of something large.

"It's a responsibility being courted by a poet." I said it with half-bland sarcasm, but civilized sarcasm, intelligent and affectionate, and I said it sexlessly, bodilessly: it was all nerve-endings and voice.

I saw him, in his hysteria, register the technical device—he was slightly jolted by it.

He didn't want to give me credit for it.

"It *is* your responsibility to love me," he said angrily, with unnecessary anger, vaguely unbalanced, unfooted, pushed off-center by me, "I am a *great* poet." Rage and some placation in him were sloshing around in nervous stridency and extreme attention inside a drunken and, I believe, malicious hysteria—like a state of shock in which a man might enter battle and function without knowing what occurred physically to him.

I started to laugh, not a kind thing. Before he could speak, I said, "What isn't?" My responsibility. "I suppose I have to give up." He quieted then, quieted some, at once—some hysteria.

But I am a liar in a certain way. I said, as his breathing simmered down, "I think I better go home." That is, it was my turn to *complain.*

But he took it as abominable insult, I think, and as abominable hurt. He sobered his hysteria to a degree so final that it was abruptly

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charming—he did it to placate me. I don't want to exaggerate but I felt suddenly what it must be like to be a beautiful woman and young and to have men do as you want without your having to be *ugly* to command this.

I ascribed him doing this—and he eyed me and smoked and drank and overtly didn't eye me as he got calm—to my *beauty*: the sexual thing because of Ora and my being a good writer.

But I didn't want to get hooked on that stuff, that childish or beautiful-woman's power, because it was the stuff of unreal worlds, stifling love affairs, phone calls, the treehouse disciplines of an infatuation partly based on feeling the rest of the world is savage and short-tempered and dull, and so you have to keep talking and generating the absent-from-the-world pair of voices thing in order to hold brutality at bay.

I mean, there were guys and women in New York who had maybe four or five such affairs going on at once, sometimes sophisticatedly supplying for two of the affairs, news of the other three: a woman I knew from college used to fall in love with pretty wives and she would love them and court them but have an affair with the husband and then she had an outside social climbing kind of affair or two, one with a man, one with a woman, but she liked women better, and she always claimed she loved me, that she lived as she did because she couldn't have me. In a city like New York—a friend of Johnno's, a boring poet, called it Nude Yock Zitty: zitty meant pimple: Yock meant a loud laugh—adjacent lives spill over in really odd patterns of attachment. I had a distant cousin who had come to New York to live: he was amazingly ugly and amazingly vain; he had some money and he was a good talker, really good; and he had these webs of affairs, some based on speech but especially based on pimping for kinds of vicarious excitement or voyeurism more analogous to an erotic espionage and a kind of power-broking than to sexuality or to emotion—I mean nothing was distilled, concentrated; everything was splattered, everything was splashed and spilled as soon as it was brewed. An ironic vanity—the sort that such a man as I had, and I knew three other men who did that stuff—is akin to madness and falls over into it—then these guys claim that madness is art, their art. I assumed, rightly or wrongly, that they weren't competent artists to start with—their lives and work did not seem like art—but since art is learnable, the issue was what sort of stuff did their lives produce, and it seemed to me their lives produced fraudulence, ego, the claim of insight (based on the success of their

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pimping the vicarious stuff, the erotic espionage and tales of madness, and peddling their lives and pandering to others) without foundation, and that, all in all, these guys formed a demonic legion of lovers for whom everything was inverted and whose judgments and opinions reversed all truths: they did this to protect themselves, sometimes knowingly. They were all subject to bursts of confession—but they were not held to the facts of the confession since they were all confessedly mad and they all were drunken.

I expected someone as smart and New Yorkish as Johnno to *know* I was being both clumsily stylish and clumsily honorable in refusing the role of The Beautiful Man—or Beauty on the Hoof—or part of a legitimately legendary love affair—I mean it was of enormous public advantage to me to have Johnno's feelings for me publicized and for me to have some publicly back for him—it would have compelled attention, compelled even posterity.

So, in a very complex way, as if I were huddling under a tree in a noisy rainstorm, and with unutterably minor dignity—or lack of dignity—I said, "I saw a movie once, *Rope*, it was supposed to show events in continuous time: it was interesting but it couldn't do it well, the thing of how facial expressions matter in real life and what lying does. I mean if time is continuous, talk and acts don't have to be typical in order to have meaning, they have meaning because of when they occur, in a tower of glasses—in a sequence of minutes. The typical is too grand to apply to real people."

"Yes?" he said angrily but humanly: this wasn't the full spectrum: he was holding back. "The intelligence with which we are *intelligent* about '*art*' and '*love*' are *always* '*only*' *too* typical: a *passionate* MOOD is much more intelligent—" See, he was *talking* again.

"You're talking about something else, Johnno. I have asked everyone, everyone I know, 'Is everyone lying about life when they talk?'"

Johnno said, "My favorite answer to every question is yes."

"My favorite answer is *That's not true.*" Then: "When did you decide about women, to be both—a man and a woman:—in yourself?"

Johnno, tossing spittle when he spoke, and drinking less steadily, said, "I never talk about women or baseball—"

"Do you ever get scared that a woman might kill you? Poison you? If you answer no, I know you're not honest."

"I *am* honest. No."

"You're lying."

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"I AM NOT AFRAID OF ANYTHING!"

"I asked my father once if he had a separate name for himself, a private name, and he thought I meant his prick." Johnno calmed down precipitously. "He answered me: *I call myself, fool or pal, I got a tool, it's all handle, it's no rake, but I bet it's useful in a garden.* So I explained I meant a nickname for himself, his whole self—well, he, uh, wouldn't answer me *honestly* and he was dying. I'd heard him call himself *pal* but he wouldn't admit it. He teased, he evaded. People really don't want you to know. Or maybe it's just me because I want to know. I think I spend more time grubbing for answers to questions than anyone I know, a lot of time—really a hell of a lot. At least you talk some. I would say it was one of the technical problems of being alive for a man, how to get answers from another man."

Johnno said in an airy spattering voice, "You're just another pretty bureaucrat."

He was getting too drunk for anything but drunken monologues and for what the Greeks called *stichomythia*, a kind of short-speeched give and take, more poetry and exclamation than sense, tricky exclamations, dramatic talk that, like dream stuff, often doesn't seem interesting in any other context than the dream.

"Bullshit."

"*You* are Perfect Bullshit."

"Fuck off, Johnno."

"You are the *perfect* symptom of the decline of the west."

"My liking women is not an attack on you." I was disingenuous—and I was boasting.

"It's boring of you to talk about women to me, you're a boring liar about your so-called sex life with that big-tit bitch who is laughed at for the whore she is—"

He panted with the half-urgency of the criminal real: love's spectrum—he is someone verbal who wants an event to happen that will be an acclaimed fact though it is an unreal—or merely political—event.

His hand was on my upper thigh.

"Your teeth are yellow from too much smoking, you are probably having fag menopause—" His hand fluttered on me. I pushed it off and he flickingly stroked my wrist while I was pulling my hand back to my own lap. "Ora's not so whorish—"

She was, though, in a number of ways. And she was bitchy, too. She dressed to attract attention and then she hated sexual attention and was lordly and openly bitchy about it. He made me—flick-

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eringly—ashamed that I loved her—or whatever it was that held us together: sexual terror eased by the other, the lesser strain on consciousness in being domestic, the simpler responsibility of mutual protection.

"So long as men pause for me and don't piss on me the way they do you, my dear—"

My sexual existence insulted him: it made him ache.

I was slouching as a form of politeness but now I straightened up: what the hell: why not be The Young Man I was.

But then I slouched again, I felt or mis-saw and imagined the ache coming off him so strongly.

"You are so witty—" I said toadying in so dry a way it seemed an insult—a posture of sexual superiority.

Or of the possession of a living tie to someone. Ora.

Johnno, now, began moment by moment, to have a greater and greater air of truly extraordinary drunkenness, a quality of a psychological and emotional density of hurt and bitterness—I myself hated being said no to in the way of being turned down sexually: hated? My mind would collapse and my spirit would burn—literally be consumed as if by an acid or by fire—longing was considerably easier than being turned down, to having one's value shunted onto some track of the peripheral and the unnecessary—often I believed it was better not to try things rather than undergo that being burned—and then the rage of talking or forcing someone somehow to agree or to swindle them into it or plead—those elements of the self, those further rooms of a moment, I loved and was uneasy about and considered to be a kind of hell—a self I didn't dare live with. The moment is cluttered with the fires of refusal. And of retribution. Johnno has taken on a cluttered speed of rage—a derangement. And I am guilty, and ashamed, and conceited, and frozen and rigid. He is a rare metal too heavy to be moved by wind or by arm or hand: only by self-will. He is not sanely physical. He was in motion according to his own drunken will only. He said, "Wit is not for liars about love—" dismissing me as a writer for the moment.

"I thought that's just what it was."

"*You* would—you haven't a witty bone in your body."

"Shakespeare thought wit was for the deprived."

"He was a fag," Johnno said. "He was like me."

"Not entirely."

"Listen to the pouf calling the kiddle black—"

"Fartmouth, lay off—why do you get so drunk?"

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"You get your words from a *Victorian* dictionary."

His personality asserted that this kind of talk was 'human,' a courtship thing as threat and insult—and as dismissal—and that it was all right to be like this.

The willed half-imposture, half-reality of him made up the American beauty of his work.

He was professional. I wasn't. He was professional and in a greater way and to a greater extent and more sufferingly than some of the people I knew uptown who were like him in being professional but who were lesser at it. And everything he said and did, his spoken stuff and his gestural language outward, or in soliloquy, was solitary work made public and communal by craft and will, and subject to lapses of craftsmanship and feeling but not to lapses of will. He was seriously under a discipline that I avoided but could not avoid all my life but hoped to escape for a while since it was an editorial discipline and not subject to music and did not permit the kind of thing I had with Ora, which, for all I know, was an untrue thing but I didn't want to live without it or to live mocking it, just yet.

I denied him in every way I could: "There is something amateur in you," I said dishonestly, being unwilling to face the reality of him being a professional and me being what I was, whatever it is I was.

"There is something amateur in you," he retorted, "You and your desire to have everything washed with soap—I'm going to get someone who's not afraid of sex to fuck me," he said. He'd caught sight, past my shoulder, of a thin, young guy, really young, in a dark t-shirt—a dark t-shirt was still *secretly* stylish then. The guy had a sensitive face, intelligent eyes—big hands—I mean he was a sexually alive sort of presence but the aliveness was like a guttering candle, a sort of abused flame—he wasn't a star.

That quality in him was truly interesting but genuinely fragile—a fairly strong guy in some ways but not an artist and, so, hugely vulnerable. I never went near people like that, even in friendship: they got too hurt.

I was jealous. Of Johnno and his wickedness (I thought it) and his moods, his awfulness, and his attention. I would guess he envied me more violently than that but I can't tell from my feelings, only from the way he acts. I have to watch and interpret. I was a coward toward Johnno, almost always, because of his pain. I felt admiration and contempt. I loathed him coldly and could have kicked him and tormented him easily except that I don't do those things.

Except maybe in my own way.

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At basement doors
boys
move in neon light—
it seems like it is the usual American death . . .
(Johnno Fynner)

Johnno was truly smart and often wrong and often out of control, even in his adroit and gorgeously accoutered mind, his intellect, so that I was really, in a sense, scared, in the ways he said I was, of his *reality*; but I didn't blame myself for being scared of it. I wasn't interested-and-scared by the lies in his public role or by him being a death-lover and him being a delicate violence-hound. I was scared that I was a fool. And I didn't want his suffering since I had my own. Well, at the time, actually, I was happy; but happiness is a kind of terror.

He was doing eye-stuff with *The Person* (Johnno's term).

I said, "I think I'll get going. I'll leave you to romance—"

He sort of tossed his head. He decreed his reply as witty and so it was, when his face and eyes were added in: "Are you off to do the toilets? Don't say you don't do them; it's clear you do: your face drips with the experience—What a hypocrite you are . . . Go and dream of me: you will—why deny it?"

You lie, Wiley, if you claim that the world exists in a manner even slightly with courtesy toward men like us.

Mad fragments of loneliness on fire.

Ambitious people, I guess.

I was tired of him for now. I suppose that hurt him. I don't know.

A thickset man, fortyish, is smiling in a broad way at Johnno—it is odd how the room comes real when I stop attending to Johnno. The forty-year-old thickset man is leaning back and smiling with broadened, not thinned lips, it's an oddly claiming and atmospheric sort of smile; he is smiling in that way and with deadened, staring eyes at Johnno.

And The Person In the Dark T-Shirt is now lying on the floor, an arm under his head and is staring at a number of people in turn. He is being a stud generally. He is not centered on Johnno. He, The Person, is young—is fragilely conceited . . .

"—a rah di odd—dee—dah—" The verbal gull-flocks, wings beating, cries circling, climbed, whistled, and boomed in my ears off and on.

Johnno is aware of the knots and ramifications here but his

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language for it is jocular or journalistic, extreme and yet weak, dream-come-true or nightmare.

I was jealous that I was unable to live as these people did, that I *couldn't* do it psychically.

Johnno took my hand and kissed it. He was seated. I was standing getting ready to leave, giddily, as I just said, I'd thought he was busy, but now I sobered up, and was myself, a thin young man while he then embraced my knees.

The way Johnno hallucinated was different from the way I did it. I was hallucinatory but logical and *civilized* self-consciously I guess, as confusedly I detached myself from Johnno's hug not knowing why I was so firm. But I tried to see or feel but I couldn't. I didn't want to. I tried to see myself leaving—as Johnno saw me. That seemed a vandalism. His size, his style, it was a vandalism for me to attempt to fit into it with my load of sensations and beliefs and what-have-you. I was teased in that a different embarrassment accompanied each flick of my hallucinatory imagination. I was embarrassed for Johnno, for myself for hating him in *this* way—without entertwining hatred, fleshly and immediately—for my piously not hating him.

I could imagine a scene in bed but it would have involved him being *calmer*—that is to say, not Christ-haunted. Or mother-hunted. I don't know. I was embarrassed that I didn't fit in. It was serious for me that *these truths* about what I felt existed for the moment: it amounted to, it came to a total that suggested inadequacy, a complete inadequacy as *a man*: it took outward shape as a shrinking at the groin. This is what in the end Johnno aroused in me, and most people's sexual wildness did, an impotence. Maybe at the possible complicity in what otherwise might occur.

I can't do it their way.

I wanted to. I half-wanted to, I mean. Maybe another time I would be able to do it—and then I would do it (display myself, behave sexually publicly, exist fully in this world, self-murderingly—).

"You always were a lousy cocksucker. You'd better go home." Johnno said that. I stood clear of his arms. He was smoking.

"So the party can start. I've never sucked cock."

"You lie: you sucked mine—"

"No. I did not. I apologized to you for it."

Then he said, "You're too snobbish, you prick—"

You are a murderer in your way.

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Then he said: "You are A Pretty Policeman who doesn't acknowledge *suffering.*" He sneered it. I had a funny reaction, sort of an oblique one. I was startled anyone drunken could say something so ornate.

Maybe his mind was entirely superior to mine.

It scared me, the social and erotic reality, the lies, the kind of free-floating force that a kind of free-floating *brilliance* has—the free-floating brilliance in everyone, and Johnno's particular brilliance.

Do lies guarantee, do they promise a shoddy embrace? I mean, the self is everywhere in one's flesh. And you go to bed with every act and every word the other has ever done or uttered.

A liar's sexuality is unutterably demeaning. To fuck for ambition—or style—is cleaner but that is unutterably a trespass, too.

The person in the dark t-shirt smiled at me and said, "I dig you."

'Dig' was new to me then as that sort of word, so it was outside-of-school, what he said, it was freed language, it was a remark apart from what so far various anguished male exiles had said to me. Anyway, naturally, I felt desire, but it had no shape, that desire, it didn't indicate what it wanted: to hurt everyone and then to die? To violate myself and then to accept death with relief? To kill him in some way? To tie him to an anxious and burdensome sense of me, to drown him in me, in the reaches of the self I could never keep track of? And for me to have his body as my toy, my dream—and his absurd and ridiculous and silly pride—his boy's pride—teach me pride and a new language? I would have liked to have set sail from consciousness as it was and be a new Odysseus, a killer in a new myth, in ruthless adventure, to find out what I could do in the sexual world in which grownups lived.

No one at the party whom I looked at was openly phallic: it was all sidelong, all studious in a way. No one had that command that guarantees the *sexual* performance will have some *sexual* meaning, no one there had that level of sexual melodrama in public. Ora had it.

But maybe my saying that means only I have certain tastes.

But people there—at the party—did look romantically interesting, emotionally valid: they had *that* intensity: they had qualities: they were being interesting, worriedly so: they looked, all of them, as if they had adroit minds thorny with consciousness and calculations.

The death of sin? You can't have the death of something that never was. I NEVER think of SIN. But the birth of *love*? No. It was the death of

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private authority. It was like a self-conscious but engendering fuck. It leads to a pregnancy you don't abort. And, so, your life changes. A party, a faction, a style. It was part of a moment of the cultural death of a trumpery era—and all sorts of tyranny were going down—it was a revolution—not beginning there—but shown to me, I saw it for the first time, the dethronement of some of the second-rate rules of our immediate pasts.

But nothing really first-rate was in place here: it was the possibility of the first-rate that was being set in place there.

And people were dying in various ways on these barricades and in these attempts. They were unbearably brave, unspeakably blind.

I have been drafted at times for others' daydreams. Often their instructed daydreams. It is a curious villainy. I was the cause of evil. One might have *a daydream* of having the issue in one of one's making a sexual choice, one might daydream of having that forcefully dealt with by a human authority, having human power in the sexual world, someone to inflict with a kind of knowledge—and responsibility—the terror and rage that can be inflicted by actual command on actual obedience, actual response—it is not particularly American, this stuff—but it is always present here and it is sexual. I am an authority. I have some authority. I have had it since childhood. Sometimes it seems others will submit fully over the full range of their capacities if I will it. My worldly value lies in a kind of warfare with people that is hedged with hypocrisy since I am a kind of pacifist. Cunning has its merits then but I am not especially cunning. Or perhaps I am: cunning people thought so sometimes. But I was in the position at a moment of the death of most kinds of authority of being offered a sexual authority—among the rebels . . .

What I dislike most in the 'art' of the men of my time was their boast of this sort of power in the world. They have it. But they trust the atmosphere of the response to them as if it had led to a successful affair—or a sad one but sad ones were all the world ever had. It seems to me a mind's trust, a heart's trust can be earned or won or bought by the histories of one's successes and failures in the world but then something is wrong. One is a teacher then. If one is not an artist, if one is a fool, after all, one can believe that one's sexual authority is only someone else's illusion and that one knows what the world is: this was Ora's mistaken notion. But sexual authority is very real. And it is an act of will. One can trust the spirit and one's luck in these matters but that's not the most suitable trust for art or love any more than it is for piety. Nor are art or piety—or sexual authority—

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only matters of courage in a direct sense or of trusting one's courage. Courage and sexual authority are the same thing but that courage is not the only human quality involved. In the demonic risk admitted to in art, and admitted to in worldliness, a handful of texts might serve as an example for the most extreme risk of the soul's merit but one would admire this on the basis of *mistrust*— keeping one's mistrust at one's side—and an amplitude of courage would mean one wasn't listening. The truth of a sort is I can do anything I like for a while—and Ora will *enjoy* it—my reputation will benefit—we will *all* be violent . . .

Everything is confused in me—everything. The human rage blazing in me sickens me. The one thing I know is that I have a *first-rate* mind attached to this peculiar physical authority—and that this is what life is for me—sort of.

I don't know what any of this really means. One wanders free inside the sexual—and intellectual—imagery and reality of the moment. Of the age. The degree of *my* honesty here is not great but what there is of honesty in me is comparatively *pure.*

One man's eyes, he was an old poet, were wide and metallurgically human, lecherously interested in what, as a young man, I had as a sexual life and might do: his eyes heatedly smelted dross, a shabby and stinking ore. The heat and adventure of another man: the odor of hot slag. The *love* of others. On the canvases here near me real objects are glued to painted and curved canvases: these present episodes, notes from a life, the forepart of the consciousness showing off how well it knows what *art* is at the moment.

Choice feels like a machinery of habit with only a flickering now and then into sensations and sacredness and the immediate refusal of the raw freedom such sensations offer. It wasn't clear, then or now, that I was scared sensibly.

A girl near the door said to me, "What does it take to get a mean son of a bitch to go to bed with me—and to be my very own?"

Me? The girl talking to me? I smiled sophisticatedly. A role. I didn't want her to laugh at me.

Johnno had said earlier: *I know love backwards and forwards.* A joke. A bluff.

Possibly a truth.

I went out the door, away from eyes alive with art and appetite —eyes with the appetite for art, eyes oblivious to *ordinariness.* I went down the steps and out onto the empty street.

In the dark, in the empty perspective, I had an attack of in-

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solence, of impertinence toward the wills and sacrifices and egos at the party, an earthly sharpness toward their *awful* human velocity which was maybe the most important single *worldly* truth; but I could have no honest part of it, a man of my sort, a remnant Jew like me.

I mean I could do it, or be part of it, only as a kind of rage or in a self-emptying—I could no more do it in the ways they expected of me than I could ever write what I actually felt in any language other than English.

But this was secret. And incomplete.

At the Avenue cars and trucks sporadically ran with headlights blotching the urban dark between the rows of the giant buildings—they were maybe like phosphorescent crabs in an immense streambed. Some lighted windows were in high buildings—a high, teetering geometry of latter day illumination—after dark. Some distant neon signs were lit—the urban colors of messages. Taxis carrying people went by, pallid faces behind glass. A taxi stopped and took me on; and the taxi driver and I in mutual dislike and caution at sight—he looked dirty and crooked, and I looked educated and I don't know what else—spent the time bumpily mute, in ignorance of each other effortfully, one of the series of transactions by which I made my way back to Ora and to the rooms and things and notions and the bed in which my life was rooted that year.

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André Malraux

REMEMBERING TROTSKY

The motor stopped before a transom, and the muffled throbbings of the sea, close by, filled the silence of the night. Slowly, advancing on the path opened by our lights, preceded by a discreet young comrade carrying an electric lantern, appeared a pair of white shoes and white trousers—a pajama suit reaching up to the neck. The head remained hidden by the darkness of the night. I have seen faces that express exceptional lives: almost all are distinct countenances. I waited with greater curiosity to look at this face marked by one of the world's greatest destinies.

From the moment that this phantom in eyeglasses stopped, I noticed that all the force of his features was in his mouth—smooth, tense lips, extremely determined—an Asiatic statue. He laughed until the strangeness wore off, with a head laugh that seemed to bear no relation to his voice (a laugh disclosing small teeth far apart, extraordinarily young teeth in the fine face, embellished by a white head). His voice, obliging and imperious at the same time, seemed to say: "Let us finish quickly with these cordial greetings and pass on to more serious things."

Serious things for him in this period when direct action is forbidden as a condition of his remaining in France were, in a word, the exercise of his intelligence. At the great writing desk on which a revolver served as a paperweight, the presence of Trotsky brought to mind one of the most suggestive problems: the relation between character and destiny.

We attribute to the blind a rigorous certainty of judgement. I think that is due to the fact that the blind judge a man only by his voice. In effect, nothing, neither the face, nor the smile, nor his conduct, expresses man, for the simple reason that man is not expressible. But of all these tiny open doors, it is certainly the tone of voice which shows the greatest possible quantity of personality. Trotsky did not speak his own language; but even in French, the principal quality of his voice dominates completely what he says—the absence

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Editor's Note: This essay first appeared in Spain in June 1934.

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of that insistence with which so many betray that their great zeal in convincing others is only a desire to convince themselves; the absence of the will to seduce. Most great men have in common a heaviness of expression, this confusion, this mysterious center of the spirit which appears to spring from doctrine and exceeds it in every sense, and which produces the habit of considering thought as something that must be conquered and not as something which repeats itself. In the domain of the spirit, this man had forged his own world, and in it he lived. I remember the form in which we spoke of Pasternak:

LT: Almost the entire Russian youth follows him in actuality, but to me he does not appeal very much. I do not care for the art of technicians, art for specialists.

AM: For me, art is, above all, the highest or the most intense expression of a legitimate human experience.

LT: I think that this art will be reborn in all of Europe. In Russia revolutionary literature has not yet produced great work.

AM: The true expression of revolutionary art has not been produced by literature but by the cinema, isn't that so? As much before as after, the cinema; before, Potemkin, and afterwards the Mother.

LT: Lenin thought that communism would express itself artistically through the cinema. With reference to Potemkin and the Mother, many have spoken to me in the same way in which you do. But I am going to tell you something: I have never seen those films. When they were first shown, I was at the front. Later others were shown, and when they returned to the earlier ones, I was already in exile.

This art of the first fruit of the revolutionary cinema, this art which in so many concepts corresponds to his life and which forms a part of his legend, Trotsky has never seen.

AM: Why is not literature to disappear and make room for another art genre, just as the dance, which expressed the art of primitive tribes, has been replaced by the arts of our own epoch. We separate the cinema from painting, but I think that is of little significance. It is writing that has killed the dance: there is in the cinema a way of writing that is not created with words, which could very easily kill writing itself: the word killing the dance, the image killing the word.

Trotsky smiles.

LT: It is difficult for me to answer about the effects on the dance. Bear in mind that I know very little about this thing technically.

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Yet it seems to me that the dance has been preserved, but what happened is that it has evolved. And more, I think it could even be reborn with all that it possessed in other epochs, but enriched. Humanity never abandons what it has once conquered.

AM: Nevertheless, it has abandoned at least eight hundred years of ancient values, and I am persuaded that for man of the year 700, it would have been impossible to understand Pericles, just as it would have been impossible for Pericles to comprehend man in the year 700. Also, the spiritual life of ancient Egypt was scarcely accessible to Pericles.

LT: Egypt.

Trotsky shoves it aside. It is evident that he knows little of Egypt. "But referring to Christianity," he continues, "look, I am suspicious. I think that we have idealized too much the early years of Christianity. Undoubtedly there existed an immense majority who understood hardly anything, mystics who were ascetics and agile mercenary people who made up the majority of the Church."

Is it possible that Trotsky is reconstructing primitive Christianity through the eyes of the Russia of his youth?

He continues, "You are aware of the fact that when the Pope fell ill he went to the physicians and not to those who prayed. Yes, the ancient values disappeared; but they have returned."

AM: You tell me that humanity does not abandon what it once has acquired. Well then, would it therefore not be possible to admit the persistence of individualism in communism: a communist individualism as distinct from, for example, bourgeois individualism, as the latter is from the individualism of Christianity?

LT: Let us see—here, as in everything, we must start with the economic basis. The Christians lived in terms of eternity and conceded little importance to individualism because they were poor. The communists of the five year plan are in a way in the same situation, for different reasons. The periods of plans in Russia are necessarily unfavorable to any individualism, even communist. The periods of war are likewise unfavorable for bourgeois individualism. But beyond the plans or between the plans, communism will apply to itself the energy which today it applies to construction. I believe that the spirit of primitive Christianity is inseparable from extreme poverty.

Trotsky is tired. His French, more rapid now, becomes less pure. He uses more frequently an unexpected vocabulary, giving it a singular inflection: "A purely collective ideology, an ideology ex-

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clusively collective, is irreconcilable with the slightest material liberty which communism and the modern world imply, in a very short time."

Accompanied by his son, I returned to the city, abandoning the lonely villa.

* * *

The next day we speak of the campaign in Poland:

AM: Some specialists in France say that Tukhatchevsky was defeated because the tactic of Weygand consisted in changing the axis of the action in the middle of the combat, a tactic which the Russian general did not understand. I always distrust specialists in such matters.

LT: Tukhatchevsky knew very well that it is permissible to change the axis of the battle. That is not the question. There were two causes for the defeat: in the first place, the arrival of the French.

AM: This has been said in France but in a way to incite disbelief in the absence of more detailed information.

LT: No, it is true. The French staff arrived in all this disorder—disorder is putting it mildly. They were in a country not their own; they hadn't suffered one crushing defeat since the beginning of the campaign. They were serene. They were able to examine everything with coolness. In the second place, the army of Lemberg did not throw itself upon Warsaw, which is what it should have done. That was the essential.

AM: I know that Stalin figured in the army of Lemberg.

LT: But with all that it was a question of an adventure. I was decidedly opposed. We went through with it finally because Lenin insisted, especially because of the Polish proletariat, whose situation and disposition were difficult to grasp at that time. Add to that the fact that a revolutionary army is always exceedingly nervous; when it finds itself separated from its base of supplies, it can become demoralized by the slightest defeat, especially after a series of victories.

AM: Is it to this that you attribute the defeat of the Red Army after its successes in the war of occupation?

LT: Yes. In the war of occupation we were stronger because our forces radiated from the center—Moscow.

AM: Could the Red Army actually maintain itself industrially and chemically against a European or Japanese Army?

LT: It could place itself quickly at the level of any of them. But the

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Japanese army is not by a long shot what Europe thinks it is. You no doubt believe that it is analogous to what the German army was in 1913; but actually the Japanese army is the army of a secondary European nation. It is an army which has not yet been tested, an army which has never fought against a real occidental army.

AM: I understand quite well that for Russia, the Russo-Japanese war was a colonial war, while for Japan it was a nationalist war. But the Transiberian is nothing but a one-track railway even today. Doubtlessly Russia will try to place Japan in the same situation in which she is, not fighting in Manchuria.

LT: I think we shall fight in Baikal.

For the first time, he had said, "We." His glance became more intense as if his attention had suddenly concentrated. He had just eliminated that minimum of distraction which is part of even the most attentive conversation. I did not altogether trust this Kremlin, this Red Army which burst into the open room, over the shadowy pines and burning trees, pushed forward only by the power of that influence which a historic life may exercise, even at a time when it itself is complaining. I was thinking of Dupleix dying in his tiny alcove, ruined and humiliated, reduced to beggary, but dying on the pillow stuffed with his letters of the Indies.

"For that reason," Trotsky continued, "it would be dangerous for a government so authoritarian (referring to the Russian) to withdraw so far."

AM: Bessedovsky, in his *Memoirs*, which obviously inspire in me only a relative confidence, asserts that Stalin would draw back as far as Irkutsk only to have a free hand in the Chinese revolution.

LT: I do not believe that. To the discussion of Bessedovsky, the other (Stalin), exasperated, has been able to answer thus; but all that is only a manner of speaking. On the other hand, it is not a question of making war in Siberia with the Red Army alone. Furthermore, the principal enemy of Japan is not the U.S.S.R. Whether Roosevelt wins or perishes, the U.S. will have to find new markets.

AM: They already have Latin America. That's done, and it is not sufficient. Each day more energetically, the Americans are renouncing the open door in China. They will find themselves obliged, purely and simply, to take China. They will say, "All the other nations have colonies; the greatest economic nation of the world must also have colonies." Who will stop them? Europe will

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be quite busy, and China, once an American colony—war with Japan is inevitable.

After eating, while the others lingered over the table, we went out into the garden. The sun was setting, the sun as beautiful as the day before. The white of the houses scattered over the fields or among the fringes of the forest, now dark, appeared bluish, with a vague aspect of dull phosphorescence. Our conversation now was less intense, less rigorous. He spoke to me of Lenin, of whose work he is now writing; a work as important as *My Life* (which Trotsky does not like) in which he will treat all the themes of philosophy and tactics that he has not yet explained. A cat rushed past us: one of Trotsky's large wolfhounds was accompanying us.

AM: Is it true that Lenin was very fond of kittens? You know that Richelieu always used to have a basket full of kittens on his table.

LT: Not only cats; Lenin loved all small things—especially children. Perhaps because he did not have any. He simply adored children. In art, his taste went back to the past. But he used to say of artists: "One must let them work."

AM: Did he expect of communism a new human type, or did he foresee a certain continuity in this domain?

Trotsky thought a while. We were walking at the edge of the sea, which caressed the rocks so gently—absolute calm. "In effect a new man," he replied. For him the perspectives of communism were infinite. He became pensive again. I was thinking of all that he had said to me that morning, and he was doubtless also thinking of the same.

"But," I said, "it seems to me that for you. . . ."

"No, at bottom, I think as he did," Trotsky answered.

In no way did he say this because of orthodoxy. It seemed to me that in spite of the preparation of the revolution, civil war and the taking of power, never had this problem been planted in such form. Without doubt he wished to say that he foresaw first a continuity among human types; later an ever more pronounced separation. And I felt through him that Lenin, faced with a world in which Marxism lacked proven data, wished to experiment. In a word: in him the desire for knowledge led immediately to action. It was here, more than in our political conversation, that I felt most keenly the man of action.

The sea continued to caress the rocks as the night advanced.

LT: Look, the important thing is to see clearly. What one can say of communism is, above all—more clarity. We must liberate man

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from all that prevents him from seeing. We must liberate him from these economic facts which impede his thinking and from those sexual matters which prevent his thinking. It is here I think that the doctrine of Freud can be very useful. I see in Freud a genial detective—a man who has opened one of the greatest domains in psychology, and at the same time a disastrous philosopher.

AM: But, do you think that humanity, once liberated from religious, national or social mobilization, will accept acting instead of thinking? Will not death encounter resistance?

LT: I think that death above all is a product of use. On the one hand, use of the body; on the other, use of the spirit. If it were possible that this using up should be carried on with harmony, both of body and of spirit, death would be a very simple phenomenon. Death would meet with no resistance.

He was sixty years old and gravely ill. "Death would meet with no resistance."

* * *

I write this on my return from a popular gathering at which we saw a film on the latest celebrations in Moscow. On the wide expanse of Red Square, with arms brandishing oars, virile young women pass before the tribune from which all the leaders of the U.S.S.R., dwarfed by two gigantic portraits of Lenin and Stalin, watch the procession. The multitude applauds as multitudes always do; less as a sign of enthusiasm than of approbation. How many among them thought of you? Many, certainly. Before the projection of the film, speeches had been made for Thaelmann in particular. The speaker who would have dared to speak of you would have been quickly attacked, after the first moment of uneasiness, by bourgeois hostility and by orthodox prudence at the same time. This multitude that is silent about you is as troubled by you as it is by a bad conscience. I know the multitude. I have met it at all the meetings. I still hear its muted "Internationale" which ascended as a ground tone from the vast hall of Luna Park, as I was leaving and saw rising, approaching the height of the sidewalks, as in the cinema, the hoofs of the horses, the breast, the hostile head of the constabulary, almost lost in the night, in the parallel reflection of the electric lights over the helmets. They are the same who tirelessly come to listen to all speakers, who speak in the name of Sacco and Vanzetti, of Torgler

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or Thaelmann, because they speak in the name of the prisoners; the same ones who hide their generosity as if they were ashamed of it; as if generosity were incompatible with intelligence; the same ones who in numbers of three hundred come to hear explanations of Marx and who swell to thirty thousand when they pay their homage to Dimitroff—the only homage which they possess—the sacrifice of one evening at the cinema. Against the government which exiles you, all are with you. You belong to those proscribed persons of whom they cannot make an emigre. In spite of all that is said, printed, shouted, the Russian Revolution is for them a bloc, and all that heroism that shook the Winter Palace now feels itself humiliated by your solitude.

* * *

Once again destiny clutches you between its bloody fingers. A few days after the hopeless attack of the Austrian workers, one French government withdraws the hospitality which another French government had extended to you. You do not mean enough to make them remember their obligations. You are still worth sufficient to extract such obligations. But they could have expelled you without resorting to morality or virtue. It is you who have not lived up to your obligations. You have formed the Fourth International. You can count in the world today members by the hundreds, much more dangerous than the Third International which has two million or than the Second, without considering that the French bourgeoisie would do well at this moment to forget the Internationals and to build against the nationalisms. You write in *La Vérité* what you have never ceased doing. You have betrayed France, to whom you are under no obligation—which of course is not the case of the Grand Dukes on the Riviera. And you have been discovered (as if your house has not always been watched by the police), thanks to the surprising "nose" of a police reader of Simenon. They could have spared themselves this grotesque abuse: to free the hostages, there is no need to spit into their faces, even though that may be the custom. An "anonymous" note in *Le Matin* explains, in clear language although with that special sordidness characteristic of the military tone, "We have had Trotsky." Since what they wanted "to have" in you was the Russian revolutionist, let us remind them that there are still one hundred sixty million to be "had." But what we must say to these one hundred sixty million is that whatever doctrinal differences may exist between the government of the Soviet Union and yourself, we must recognize every revolutionist in danger as *one of ours*; that what

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they are attempting to trample in you, in the name of nationalism, is the Revolution. But there is in the bastions and in the miserable huts plenty of material with which to build an army of revolutionists. I know, Trotsky, that your thought only awaits your own triumph from implacable destiny. Can your clandestine shadow, which for ten years has perched in exile, make the French worker and all others who are animated by an obscure desire for liberty understand that to unite in a concentration camp is to unite a little too late?

Translated by Ella Wolfe

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Maura A. Daly

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL TOURNIER

The following interview with Tournier took place on a sunny summer day in Paris, in the offices of his publisher, Gallimard, after he had just published his seventh major fictional work, Gaspard, Melchior and Balthazar (The Four Wise Men).

MD: Why did you choose the three Magi as the subject for *Gaspard, Melchior and Balthazar*?

MT: I always wanted to do something with my Christian background which is very important to me because I was brought up in Christian schools. Consequently, it was one of the things I wanted to talk about. I think that the choice of the three wise men was a particularly appropriate subject for me. First of all, no one had ever talked about it; second, on the contrary, there is an immense iconographical wealth concerning the three kings. The paintings are wonderful, aren't they?

MD: In *The Four Wise Men*, did you try to relate the Christian philosophical system to any other philosophical system?

MT: No. There is only one thing that is very modern in *The Four Wise Men*; it is the idea of image and likeness which is Balthazar's problem. As you know, I am preoccupied with photography; I am very interested it it. That's very modern and is, at the same time, biblical because the question of image and likeness is in the beginning of the Bible. The political problem of Melchior is also very modern; in the problem of Herod's tyranny, there are characteristics that bring Stalin to mind: the idea of killing anyone however little he may be suspected. The person is destroyed, that's Stalin. The idea of telling the story of one's life at the end of a meal during the last courses—that was Hitler—he did it all the time. The portraits [in *The Four Wise Men*] are of rather modern tyrants, but there isn't any philosophy.

MD: Nonetheless, concerning what you said, I think that perhaps one can make a connection between *The Four Wise Men* and Heidegger's essay "*Das Ding*" ["The Thing"] which speaks of pouring oneself out in order to attain a sort of immortality, to attain a fully human status. Couldn't one make an analogy between that idea and the life of Taor, the fourth king in *The Four Wise Men*?

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MT: I agree completely, but I didn't make the analogy; however, I think that you have the right—completely—to do it. At the moment, I have just submitted to Mercure de France [a French publisher] an anthology of literary studies with a preface about reading. It will come out at the end of the year and will be entitled *Le Vol du Vampire.*[1] I think that it would interest you because it is literature once removed. For the same reason it won't interest many people. You will see that I defend the idea of a reading as an act of possession, so the reader is also the author, a coauthor. There is still something that I would like to say about the Magi. There are two things that I like about them. The first is that they are foreigners: they are people who came from far away who are not part of the "family"; I like that very much; they are travelers who arrive, who learn things that they didn't know; who make grotesque errors, for example, as does the one who arrives with his *rahat loukoum* [a pistachio-flavored dessert found in Arabic countries that is the *raison d'etre* of the quest of the fourth wise man]. The second thing is wealth, because the wise men are rich. In Christianity there is a sort of heretical idealization of poverty that I detest because Jesus always defended himself against misconceptions concerning poverty; for example, when Mary Magdalene poured out a very, very expensive perfume on his feet, the disciples were indignant and said, "But that's idiotic, with all that money we could have done . . ." etcetera, and He said, "So then, I have no right to precious ointment? I like nard!" Then, there is the parable of the talents which is a banking parable. . . . There is also the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor where Christ's beauty was resplendent—a divine beauty. It was not a humble beauty; it was shattering, awe-inspiring: He very much resembled the sun. That is how I conceive of Christianity; I envision a solar Christ, not a mendicant Christ.

MD: Why then does Christ appear only in an oblique fashion in *The Four Wise Men*? Was it a political question?

MT: No. It was simply a matter of my inability as a novelist. You know that depicting Christ is overwhelming. It is terribly difficult. . . . Who can allow himself to do it? First of all, I have a model—Flaubert's *Herodiade*—Christ is in it too . . . but He is far off—on

1. Michel Tournier, *Le vol du vampire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1981).

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the horizon—you know? Everything goes on more or less behind His back.

MD: You employ myths very often in your novels. For you, what is the importance of myth in twentieth-century literature, not only in your works, but in literature in general?

MT: Well, I'll tell you, that doesn't really interest me very much. What interests me a lot is the role of myth in the daily life of people. For example, if you watch advertisements on television, you see myths appear: the myth of purity, everything that concerns cleanliness, etcetera . . . the myth of nature; the myth of Robinson Crusoe who appears everywhere—doesn't he? The desert island, the Club Med, vacations, tans, fixing things—all that is summarized by Robinson Crusoe.

MD: In the history and the literature of the twentieth century one sees a sort of progressive atomization (perhaps related to the discovery of the atomic structure itself). Novels have moved from the interior monologue to those displaying a totally fragmented psyche. Don't you think that myth attempts to put man back into a sort of unified framework and by means of myth man is able to unify his experiences? That view is, however, from a critical perspective.

MT: That seems a very, very good idea to me, because there are unifying myths. In general, however, myths are rather destructive. I mean, myth is almost always the exaltation of an antisocial hero—on the order of Don Juan. Don Juan is antisocial; Tristan is antisocial. Nonetheless, you can still have unifying myths: in France, that of Joan of Arc. So, the national myth, the national hero, which are unifying, those belong to another category. As for me, I am struck by the antisocial function of myth. I have the impression that everything in society tends toward order and that myth is a means for the individual to escape from an order that suffocates him, by means of a hero who is revolting against the established order. For example, the wife who cheats on her husband can think of Isolde. *Tristan and Isolde* is a story of a woman who deceives her husband, isn't it?

MD: That is the question that Denis de Rougemont deals with in *Love and the Occident.*

MT: Yes, exactly. So, the woman feels exalted because she experiences passion [of mythic proportions]. She can do nothing against it. She is consumed by passion for someone besides her husband; she is even exalted because of it. As for her husband, he

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doesn't understand—he is King Mark [Isolde's cuckolded husband].

MD: He is overwhelmed by the events.

MT: Exactly.

MD: How do you see the literary hero of the twentieth century?

MT: He doesn't really interest me enormously. I'm interested in the mythological hero. There is a big difference. The mythological hero exceeds the work and is more famous than his author. Don Juan, for example, is more famous than Tirso da Molina; Robinson Crusoe is more famous than Daniel Defoe, whereas the literary hero remains a prisoner of the work. That is the case of Balzac's Vautrin [in *Le Pere Goriot*] or Proust's Charlus [in *Remembrance of Things Past*]. The hero must not dominate the literary work, but he must have an organic place; in the last analysis, I conceive of the novel as a hero. My novel develops, it resembles a tree, and I am nothing but the gardener; I water it; I take care of it; I hope that it will grow—and it grows a little bit outside of me. For example, the three Magi who had been sleeping for years in my drawer suddenly sprang to life. I can explain it a little, but in the end, it is still bizarre. I'm explaining it after the fact—you know?

MD: Was your conception of myth influenced by the structuralism of Levi-Strauss?

MT: Yes, I was a student of Levi-Strauss's.

MD: At the College de France?

MT: No, at the Museum of Man. I was at the Museum of Man during the years 1950-1952 and I had Levi-Strauss as a professor.

MD: Did you study the works of the great ethnologists, for example, Boas, Malinowski, and Durkheim?

MT: As for Malinowski, yes. When I was at the Museum of Man, Levi-Strauss told me, "Listen, since you read German, there is a gentleman whose name is Guisinde, a German who has devoted his whole life to a tribe of Fuegians, the Selknams. You are going to study that and then give an oral report about it." Consequently, I became the "Selknam man." Malinowski is a marvel. The Trobriand Islands—an archipelago—are fabulous. The Trobrianders are extraordinary. They do not make the connection between intercourse and the birth of a child—that's wonderful. Nine months separate the two events—there is no relationship between them. It is the rain that makes the woman fertile. The gentleman who sleeps with her is not the father, but the uncle—he's a lover and a

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friend. It is a magnificent social structure, much more attractive than ours. It is the mother's brother who lives with the children, who brings them up . . . etcetera.

MD: You use fairy tales as well as myths in your works. What is the difference between the fairy tale and the myth?

MT: The fairy tale—you will see in *Le Vol du Vampire*—I have a chapter on fairy tales—for me, they are broken and diminished myths—little myths. Fairy tales have an effect on us because we do not recognize the myth, but it is there. . . . For example, Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard* is full of unlikely events, and we accept these events because underneath there is a great myth, but we don't recognize it. Bluebeard leaves, saying to his wife, "I'm leaving on a trip, here are the keys to the house. You can use all the keys except the one that opens this chamber. If you open it, you will die." It is a crazy way to act. He is courting disaster, but he does it anyway, and we accept it. Why do we accept it? Because we recognize, without realizing it—it is a matter of remembering—Yaweh's saying to Adam and Eve, "You can eat of all the fruits of Paradise except that one, and if you eat from it, you will die." And Yaweh goes away. It is that memory that is at work—that explains why we accept Bluebeard's pronouncement. Naturally, the wife opens the chamber door and drops the key on the ground. The key is stained and she cannot get the stain out. In that respect too, the myth of the indelible spot is very much established, very profound—the anguish of the small stain and then besmirched honor, and then virginity. . . . There is a whole mythology of the indelible spot which makes us accept this story but which doesn't hold up apart from it. For me, that is what a story is, but not necessarily a fairy tale.

MD: Which of your novels do you prefer, and why?

MT: I prefer *Gemini.* Simply because it is the most my novel . . . it is the one that (but these are purely personal considerations) is based on nothing. *Vendredi* is based upon Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; *The Four Wise Men* is based upon the Scriptures; *The Ogre*, although it is less obvious, is based upon Nazism; there is the war, etcetera. . . . These are ways of treating, of retreating those things, whereas with *Gemini* there is nothing. It is a thick book based upon nothing. It is I.

MD: A personal invention?

MT: Yes, that's right—and then, it is also the one that is the most ambitious.

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MD: How would you describe your literary style?

MT: I was watching a television show the other day—a literary show, *Apostrophes* with Bernard Pivot. Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Déon, and Robert Kanters were on. There were two novelists with opposing points of view: Robbe-Grillet and Michel Déon, and two literary critics: Kanters and Poirot-Delpech. They were arguing about how one should write, etcetera. If I had been there and somebody had asked me: "And you, where do you stand in all of this?" I would have said, "Me, I'm not part of all that, I don't understand anything about everything you are saying because I"—what I am going to say is horrible—I wouldn't have told them, but I'll tell you—"I have something to *say*!" For example, in *The Four Wise Men,* I have Christianity, all of Christianity to discuss, you know? So, I am not going to ask myself questions about rhetoric. I have a huge subject matter, a tremendous amount of work to do, and I choose the literary form that is the easiest, the most obvious for me, and the closest to the Scriptures since I have a model. I would have told them, "You have questions that you ask yourselves about construction, all the problems of the *nouveau roman.*" As for me, in the last analysis, I am not really literary. I don't have much of a literary bent, I think.

MD: If you were a critic, what would be the aspect of your work that would fascinate you the most?

MT: First, I want to say that there are things that I would criticize. For example, in *The Ogre,* I am sorry that there is only one character who dominates the whole. In my opinion, that isn't a novel. In a novel, there have to be several characters—all of them important and all different from the author. But there is only one of him. Then, there is much too much philosophy.

MD: In *The Ogre*?

MT: Not in *The Ogre,* but in *Vendredi.* It crops up everywhere.

MD: If you'll permit me to say so, I think that *Vendredi* is a great success in the line of Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pécuchet. Vendredi* is a totally abstract work, but you have succeeded in putting enormous charm, lyricism, and a certain exotic spirit into it.

MT: Thank you. Something that I prefer, perhaps over *Gemini,* is *Pierrot ou les secrets de la nuit,* because there, really, I succeeded in infusing the story with the maximum amount of philosophy, ontology, Bachelard, matter, color, solidity, smell, biological mechanisms, and nonetheless, it remains a story for children.

MD: Yes, it is a lovely story; that is irrefutable. Now that you have

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published several very successful books, do you still see your work as an author the same way?

MT: Let's say that formerly I had material concerns which I no longer have, and I also had worries about a public that I don't have anymore. So, now I can really say what I want to—no matter to whom, even to the Pope or to the President of the Republic; they would hesitate to throw me out the door!

MD: Finally, the next-to-last question: in which philosophical current would you place yourself?

MT: In what philosophical current would I place myself? But I abandoned philosophy twenty-five years ago! I no longer have a philosophical leaning.

MD: The last question: Sartre, in his autobiography, *The Words*, says that for him language is a kind of absolute. Do you agree?

MT: He is right. A novel is a thing that is produced with words, and words have a value in themselves. Absolute means cut off from the rest, doesn't it? And it is a verbal construction.

MD: I would say that for Sartre it is not absolutely true, but that language acquires a transcendent aspect.

MT: You are right. It is much truer of other writers; it is actually less true of Sartre.

EDNA M. PHILLIPS
WHO WAS WITH US
FROM THE BEGINNING

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Jeffrey Hart

REFLECTIONS ON PORNOGRAPHY

The subject of pornography has come in for a good deal of attention lately, and for a variety of reasons. There is more of this kind of product visible in the marketplace than heretofore, and, in fact, it is a major industry. Many people object to it from different perspectives, and, indeed, they mean different things by the term. Pornography has become for some a political issue, and for others a moral and even a religious one. On pornography, the Moral Majority and Gloria Steinem agree, for once. The whole issue goes far beyond the rather narrow definitions established in current case law, in which the courts have defined the pornographic as: 1) appealing entirely to "prurient" interest; 2) focusing on the representation of human genitalia; and 3) having no redeeming social or scientific value. Those definitions, when we come to actual works of representation, are difficult to apply. In any event, the concerns of Jerry Falwell or Gloria Steinem are entirely different.

My own effort here will be one of clarification, both intellectual and semantic. My interest in this subject was awakened several years ago when I moderated a debate on it between D. Keith Mano, the novelist, and Ernest van den Haag, the social philosopher. I have since read a great deal of the literature on the subject. I offer these reflections tentatively, but also out of a sense that all of the discussion I have read has been in various ways inadequate.

In a recently collected essay, for example, Gloria Steinem characterizes as pornographic any work in which a woman is exhibited as an unwilling victim. One understands her political impulse here. But, after all, people—men, women, children—are sometimes victims. The disposition of power in a given relationship is not always equal. Such a situation ought to be available to representation. Steinem would be the most restrictive critic of *Othello* since Thomas Rhymer.

In her recent book *Pornography and Silence*, Susan Griffin writes from what could fairly be called a feminist perspective, and she—a writer of genuine poetic power—has marvelous things to say about this subject. Her central thesis or insight is a useful one, though not in the way she handles it. Griffin argues that the spread of pornography is not the result of the so-called "sexual revolution," and is by no means a celebration of eros. It is, in fact, the opposite, the

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negation of the erotic. In its exploitativeness, its reductionism, its imitativeness within the genre, its essential redundancy, it is the opposite of genuinely erotic expression. Susan Griffin is on to something here, and I will come to it in a minute.

Perhaps the most useful book I have read in this area is Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (1964). Marcus has surveyed a great deal of subliterary material, and he has turned up some colorful underground Victorian characters. He has also deployed a fine critical and historical intelligence. He notes, for example, that in the pornography we find much that was *left out*, self-censored, by the great Victorian novelists—for example, the often affectionate sexual relations undertaken with working class women by men of the middle and upper classes, and, for a further example, the way people actually talked and actually behaved in a working-class pub in 1850. The eighteenth-century artist Thomas Rowlandson could tell us about this. Dickens could not. And I was led by Marcus to reflect upon *Oliver Twist*. Surely in that milieu presided over by Fagin, and with Bill Sykes in a prominent role, those boys would not have been primarily sneak-thieves. Fagin and Sykes would have been selling them.

Marcus concludes, however, that for the most part pornography has a number of recognizable but severely limiting characteristics—and I point out here that he is dealing only with prose narrative and not with the visual arts at all. Marcus finds that pornography, sentence by sentence, strings together cliches. The consumer of pornography apparently prefers dead to fresh language. When you survey a great deal of it, as Marcus did, you find that the same situations keep reappearing. Within this genre, there is a great deal of self-imitation, even plagiarism. Its interest in characterization is feeble, as is its interest in external nature. Fantasy plays a large role, as in the amazing sexual performance of the males, and in some ways this pornography is like the Keystone Cops and other comedies: things that, in reality, would put you in the intensive care unit are routinely shrugged off. As in Voltaire's *Candide*, no one ever gets seriously injured.

So far, so good. And it is here that I wish to take my point of departure. What Susan Griffin and Steven Marcus seem to me to be describing is not some special and isolated category called "pornography," but bad art in general. Bad art exhibits precisely the characteristics that Griffin and Marcus have identified.

Take the genre of the detective story. At its highest reaches, as

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in *Crime and Punishment*, it exhibits enormous power and complexity. Raskolnikov is a St. Petersburg Hamlet, and, come to think of it, *Hamlet* is also a detective story. We can move down from *Crime and Punishment* through good but much lesser writers such as Graham Greene, Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, Dashiell Hammett, and so forth. But there is an immense literature much lower still, and it resembles Marcus's and Griffin's sense of the pornographic: full of cliches, imitative, feeble characterization, fantasy, unlikely feats.

Wuthering Heights and *Jane Eyre* are great Gothic romances, investing the "dark male" and the "passionate but unawakened woman" with virtual mythic power. And, speaking of the things that could not be said in the Victorian novel, Emily Brontë went much further in print than the sexually hyperactive Charles Dickens. The north-country novelist actually has Cathy and Heathcliffe spiritually free on "Pennistone Crag." Here, in the Brontës, we are at the top of the Gothic genre, and we can descend to Mary Shelley, Horace Walpole, Bram Stoker, and others in whom there are good things, and we can descend still further to the junky Gothic romance you can purchase at the airport, full of cliches, imitativeness, and improbabilities. *War and Peace* and *The Red Badge of Courage* are great works of literature and deal with the subject of warfare. But, of course, much war fiction and many war movies are also garbage, full of cliches, and so on.

It is not at all surprising that Susan Griffin believes pornography to be hostile to eros. Bad art *does* make you feel bad. It is the central point of Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* that bad art is hostile to life itself, and in his great poem *MacFlecknoe* John Dryden equated the bad poetry of Thomas Shadwell with excrement, constructing a typographical pun by printing Shadwell's name as Shitwell. I am not claiming for myself anything approaching the sensitivity of Mozart, who became physically ill if someone played a note out of tune. But I think most people have had the experience of being offended and angered by, say, a really stupid and banal movie. Pornography is merely bad erotic art.

Though the whole matter is charged with peculiarly intense emotion, it seems to me that it would be an aid to intellectual clarity if we put to one side for a moment the word "pornography," and held it, so to speak, in reserve.

I would argue that all areas of human experience should be—and have been, as a matter of fact—available for artistic representation. There are indeed extreme forms of human experience such as

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the battlefield, religious ecstasy, and the surgical operating room which might prove shocking or disturbing, but that is no reason to exclude them from the realm of art. I can even imagine making a college faculty meeting the subject of a work of art, though the treatment would inevitably be satirical. And there is no reason why art cannot deal with erotic experience.

Within the field of erotic art we can make the customary analyses and judgements. How well is it executed? Is it tragic or comic? What is its meaning? Does it possess originality? Of what kind? What is its relationship to the artist's other work?

I have before me on my desk, as I write, seven items of erotic art. I do not doubt that many people would consider one or more of them "pornographic," and it is even possible that some would fall within the legal definition of pornography as currently applied by the courts, though I am not certain about that. All seven items, however, seem to me interesting and valid works of the imagination, and I will describe them briefly:

(1) A book called *Eros in Antiquity*, published in 1978, consists of splendid photographs, in color, by Antonia Mulas. They depict Greek and Roman works of sculpture characterized by erotic motifs. We have vases and urns, medallions, bas relief representations, and three-dimensional statues. The sexual acts being represented are very explicit and sometimes complicated. There is no doubt that many of these items are works of art of a very high order, indeed priceless. Looking at some of these urns, one wonders afresh just exactly what was going on in the frieze on Keats's Grecian urn: "Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,/ Though winning near the goal . . ."

(2) An etching done by Picasso in 1968 exhibits a sexual act, with a voyeur peeking though a curtain into the boudoir. The style of the etching is elegant and witty, and continuous with Picasso's style in other etchings of the same period about other kinds of behavior. It would certainly be impossible to argue that this erotic drawing is not a work of art.

(3) A 1969 pencil drawing by the American artist Betty Dodson, a powerful piece of realism, depicts a couple engaged in oral sex. Dodson's execution is magnificent, and, incidentally, destroys the contention that erotic art is exclusively produced by males.

(4) A collection of photographs by the great photographer E. J. Bellocq, a sort of photographic Toulouse-Lautrec, taken around 1912, portrays prostitutes in bordellos. Bellocq, who was deformed,

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spent his days in Storyville, a district in New Orleans where prostitution at that time was legal. The photographs are enormously evocative, individualized, full of the pathos of times past, of mortality, and they even evoke the Virgilian emotion of celebrating the deeds of times long gone. The cover photograph depicts one of the most notable and desired of Storyville's prostitutes, who was, incidentally, the subject of the movie *Pretty Baby* starring Brooke Shields.

(5) A collection of photographs entitled *100 Years of Erotica*, edited by Paul Aratow and published in 1981, covers the years 1845–1945. As might be expected, they vary widely in quality; but there is a sequence of photographs taken in 1910 in Paris depicting a young couple in eight different sexual postures. The young woman wears a headband to keep her hair from flying around, which it undoubtedly would have done otherwise. The photographs are interesting and moving, and again we have an additional aesthetic element introduced by the passage of time. If that young man and woman are still alive, they would be in their nineties. But, given the apparent age of the young man in 1910, it is much more likely that he was mixed with the mud of Verdun or some such place. One is glad that they evidently enjoyed themselves while they could.

(6) More modest in artistic ambition, but by no means contemptible, are the drawings by Charles Raymond and Christopher Foss in the contemporary best-selling sex manual by Alex Comfort, *More Joy of Sex*. Though these drawings, both pastels and black and whites, are intended to be instructional within the intention of the book, they also have considerable delicacy and flair.

(7) Finally, I have before me the March 1979 issue of *Playboy*, with a characteristic centerfold depicting one Denise McConnell. She is without doubt a beautiful human being, and the photography is technically accomplished, though the message of the props is obvious mass-audience: Miss McConnell, mostly nude, has her right hand on the latch of a door, presumably to the bedroom. I am certainly not sorry that this photograph exists, and, indeed, the world would be the poorer place if Miss McConnell were not in it.

We could, of course, descend to *Penthouse*, *Hustler*, *Playmate*, *Screw* and even to still lower levels, and we could easily specify the nature of their artistic inferiority to the works we have been discussing above. But the point is that we would be dealing with *bad art* comparable to that described by Steven Marcus.

There is always the matter that a special anxiety appears to surround this issue. After all, we are not so exercised morally and

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politically over "bad art" in the detective story or in science fiction, and this leads to a moment of reflection about my initial view that "all" of human experience is available to artistic representation. Is it possible that sexuality is so unique, so utterly different from other forms of extreme experience, that we must say that it is "out of bounds?"

In an important essay entitled "The Pornographic Imagination," Susan Sontag drives a kind of wedge between erotic art and other art by defining sexuality as, in some way, "other." In a key passage: "Human sexuality is, quite apart from Christian repressions, a highly questionable phenomenon, and belongs, at least potentially, among the extreme rather than the ordinary experiences of humanity. . . . Even on the level of simple physical sensation and mood, making love surely resembles having an epileptic fit at least as much, if not more, than it does eating a meal or conversing with someone."

While our judgement is suspended, we read on: "Everyone has felt (at least in fantasy) the erotic glamor of physical cruelty and an erotic lure in things that are vile and repulsive."

I do not think "everyone" has felt that, nor has "everyone" felt that making love is akin to "an epileptic fit."

St. Paul might have agreed with Miss Sontag. Still, there are few eras in human history that do, with the singular modern exception of the nineteenth century. It is an interesting question whether we are still, somehow, living in the long aftermath of unique nineteenth-century assumptions about both art and sex. The nineteenth century emphatically did not believe that all of human experience is available to representation—at least not officially. They put pantaloons on the legs of pianos and referred to human legs, politely, as "limbs." It strikes me that the restrictions here are unique in human history, or at least Western history, thinking of the disturbing figure of the Ayatollah.

It seems to me clear that "pornography" is useless as a descriptive term as regards erotic art. When we use it we really mean that we want to "do something" about the erotic art, usually about the bad erotic art, though the Victorians "did something" about the entire range of erotic art, in the process hobbling some of their greatest artists. Indeed, as recently as the late 1940s, books by Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence had to be bootlegged through the United States customs inspectors; the legitimacy of *Ulysses* had been established not long before—an entirely absurd situation. What we want to "do about," for example, *Hustler*, is entirely a policy matter. My own an-

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swer would be that for any number of excellent reasons, the federal government should probably do nothing.

I see no reason, however, why a local community of whatever size—from, say, Newport Beach, California to New York City—should not establish if it wishes that *Hustler* be sold under the counter and not exhibited. A political community can, of course, zone its acreage to suit its idea of itself, and it does not have to accept a tannery on its Main Street. It can exclude alcohol, as does Ocean Grove, New Jersey, a fact which gives a unique serenity to that seacoast town. The press freedoms of the First Amendment do not give me the right to pin the photograph of Denise McConnell to the front of the Supreme Court bench.

My central point, however, is that all of human experience from birth through death, including the joys, the pains, the ambiguities of the erotic, ought to be available to artistic representation in the various media: narrative, painting, sculpture, photography, and so forth. When we use the term "pornography," we are not really talking about the specific object before us, but about our often unanalyzed intentions toward it.

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POEMS

John Hollander

MARKS AND NOISES

Potters, in the stark childhood of our writing,
Scratched the bent letters they could hardly use
As the shadows of voice yet over their cups
And urns for decorative purposes.
Long afterwards, abandoned alphabets
Which could not stand for language any more—
The disused runes,the dark, square Hebrew letters
Adrift in Christendom, shriveled to mere
Magic, and long since silenced hieroglyphs—
Faded into pictures of mysteries.
O letters! O domestic ghosts! the spectres
Of dead speech, they rise up about me now
From stillborn sounds laid out on this lined sheet.
O sounds of the darkened sky! Far across Long
Island Sound and its thrum of winds and waters
There drift toward me ghosts of the ancient dead
Sight of you, standing long once in your hair.

HUSH!

A touch of the hand—say, of my forefinger
To your lips, not cautioning as you might me,
But quietly exemplary—can give all
But voice to silence without breaking it.

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For such shades of vocation I could give over
The otium of the oatstraw filled with breath,
The evening whistling in the Dixie of
Solitude; I would study those solaces
As if deaf, becoming a philosopher
In my fifth and fiftieth year, a stopped pipe
That knows its own wind, an unheeding reed
Plucked from its place beside the mirroring pond
Unruffled, blown by gusts of mind that give
All but touch to surface. I would hang
The heart of music on the willing limb
Of this or that undreaming tree that stands
Beside the water without having that matter,
Without need of more than the peace of its own place.

Derek Walcott

TO NORLINE

This beach will soon be empty
for several salt-fresh dawns
of these marks the surf gently
erases with its sponge,

then someone else will come
from the still-sleeping house,
a coffee-mug warm in his palm
as my body once cupped yours,

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to mark the moving passage
of a salt-sipping tern,
like when some line on the page
is loved, and it's hard to turn.

DAYS

You are blowing as far away
as a white paper sail on the horizon,
as sand dribbled from the fingers of day.
This was your decision.

The pillow is halved by my embrace
at nights. Every day is the worst.
I can feel, humming in the crook of my elbows
the deep V of a warm waist.

There's a song here to the triangular scarf
of a woman wrapping it up. '*Adieu foulard, adieu*'
we swore once that we would take the rough
with the smooth. Better to suffer with you.

I sit with crossed hands over drawn-up knees,
foetal as ever, sometimes the sea's blindness
is my own salt. The white sail vanishes.
Merciless the blue sky in its kindness.

Yvonne Sapia

RETURN TO THE SANCTUARY

This is exactly
what you had in mind:

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you watch the bird
flap across the water
with two wings
and rise with one wing.

Often the unfamiliar
causes you to be driven
to things not included here,
to spots where earthmen
have landed to regain the fell
after the conglomerate hand
releases your body
like a bird with one wing.

You are a woman recovering
from being a woman
as if it were a serious illness;
next of kin
signs for you
and the madhouse
waits to cure you of yourself.

The mirror tells you
what you love and do not love:
the webs at the corners
of your eyes, the broken
wings of smiles.

The birds rise off the lake
with two wings
like matters of importance.

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George Starbuck

THE WORD

(fugue on a theme by Dugan, a theme by Stevens)

Word was that what word was
  would be first.
Reared back for the wild weird
  outburst,
Chaos, impatient, agog,
  heard
what the great name uttered.

Let it be with it. Wow. What it
  was was
  the the!
Everything anything, Alpha, Omega,
theirs! on a first-name basis! Get this free
  introductory the-
ology starter you name it you take it, all
hell and the kitchen sink at your beck and call!

The discount coupon. The servomotor. The larch.
The spectacles on the kerbstone after the peacemarch
and the right front wheel still spinning on the Le Car
and the bonze in the El Al also "create facts."
Stride into the donnybrook of molecular impacts.
It is as America's only purely
original living poet already
said: the the is the.

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Suzerainty is impositable in this nominating convention hoopla.
Notable moments though in the general plethora.
Socrates and Li Po
saying ta ta to τῷ τῷ.
Sartre doing an uttermost Zero Mostel.
Hubble describing the gavel as God tries
to get word in edgewise.

Velimir Khlebnikov

TWO POEMS*

The lice had blind faith, and they prayed to me.
Every morning they would congregate on my clothes,
every morning I visited punishment upon them
and listened to them crackle and die.
But they kept on returning again and again
in a quiet worshipful wave.

*

Russia, I give you my divine
white brain. Be me. Be Khlebnikov.
I have sunk a foundation deep in the minds
of your people, I have laid down an axis.

---

*Editor's Note: These poems are from *The King of Time*, to be published by Harvard University Press. Translation copyright © Dia Art Foundation, 1984.

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I have built a house on a firm foundation.
"We are Futurians."
And I did all that as a beggarman,
a thief, a man with a curse on his head.

Translated By Paul Schmidt

Kendra Kopelke

GIRL ASLEEP AT A TABLE

In the quiet room
a girl is seated at the table,
her head resting against her hand.

You see she is asleep
so you want to turn away, embarrassed,
yet you feel

strangely welcome, as if you
are the subject of her inner gaze,
the stone that holds the plum,

and to leave would be
the sharp unraveling of everything
she has put to rest,

the tapestry heaped before you,
the white jug, the bowl of fruit,
the light pushing open the door—

Behind her another room is empty
except for the dark mirror framed
on the wall, where you imagine

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the face never changes,
that it is always your face
filling the x-ray of the aging canvas.

The girl asleep at the table
dreams you awake, and you awaken,
convinced, the dream was yours.

PER WÄSTBERG

#11*

Someone's stacking the leaves of an artichoke in heaps,
cradles of blue-green and gold. Someone's recounting
the Parsifal legend for his restless child.
My daugher, with buttercups in her hair, skips
over sun-bright roots.
But somewhere else, in tiled rooms, while the cries
of anguished children scream from a tape, a policeman
puts out his cigarette in their mother's navel.
Our life—the only one we have—has so many sides. The dead
can converse only through survivors.
Who can interpret our census statistics?
Mallows at the feet of the Virgin in a medieval tapestry
signify something more than beauty in full flower.
And the moon over the soldier is more than a half-closed
eye. Meanings, soon forgotten; and yet the crack
in a kneecap remains visible centuries after
the clods of earth have fallen away.

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*Editor's Note: This poem is from "Närmare underrättelser" ("Further Particulars") in *En avlägsen likhet* (*A Remote Resemblance*) by Per Wästberg © 1983 (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand). Translation copyright © by Rika Lesser, 1985.

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Timid snakes, silenced martyrs—the all-knowing
owl flies soundlessly on the border of day and dusk.
At the moment of your birth Death breathes in your face.
Until then it cannot touch you at all.

Translated By Rika Lesser

Daphne Merkin

A GRANDFATHER, LATE AFTERNOON

He must have been
a tough cookie once
with a yen for money
and pretty, silly women.

Now he is just
another old man,
weeping often
for a drummed-up past.

He sits where he is set,
this one-time tyrant:
in the sun.
Even his toes
don't like the shade.

Vat ees your name
he asks me again,
not sure if I am a nurse
or a granddaughter
worth her weight
in marriage.

My name puzzles him.
Ees not fon the Bible?
I offer it in Hebrew

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and he smiles slowly,
his eyes crinkling
like a Samurai's.

He has no use for nature
but he faces the garden.
His belly is a monument
of its own,
rising up and down
as he snoozes.

In the late afternoon
the sun loses its warmth
and my grandfather
is wheeled inside,
his heavy black shoes
resting on the bar.

Dated and tarnished
as an old coin,
he once traded in furs,
sables and minks.

Nothing, not even value,
is timeless:
We will bury him.

Baron Wormser

WELL-BEING

A visit to the chiropractor, an extra
Glass of sherry, Boswell before bed;
Thus inspired by well-being, I stir the mundane.
Here are messages and little causes in

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A language I half-understand, that of
Half-neural, half-domesticated man. What was
Outside me enters, what was inside disappears.
I remain whole, an environment whose ignorance is
A government, one who is susceptible
To sneezing, falling, gulping,
Being warm or nearsighted or tall.
In the dark before sleep I recall
That the un-Johnsonian mind of latter centuries
Says nothing is there, that the body
Is an object of time put in motion by
A few imperious words and stilled
By a few obedient lies.
The gropings of appetite, all our dumb ritual rounds
Are subsumed beneath a more logical suffering—
Yet a certain dignity refuses to concede.
Bodies pose questions too.
How else, they ask, are we to consort with our
Perishing? How else to admit we are
Our own preludes? The belly roars.
The Doctor reaches across the table
And lays hands on what is good.

Philip Appleman

WATCHING HER SLEEP

On her left side again, the right arm pillowed,
the breathing regular as waves:
it's summertime, and childhood,
her father come to life again
to smooth her hair and drift a grassy
sidewalk toward the sundaes at Prince Castle,
and coming back alone she flies

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inches off the ground and finds her mother
saying go to sleep; it almost wakes her—
a quarter turn, worry in the forehead,
and then the steady breathing.
No one thinks it odd she's outdoors naked,
and once again the streets are full of dimes,
and when the neighbor boy starts up the mower,
she can't see where she's going in the dark,
no one will help her, and something huge
chases her along a brick wall
panting. She fights for breath,
flops over, blinks at daylight.
The warmth of arms is my reward
for the gallantry of only
being there.

Jay Grover-Rogoff

REDON DISCOVERS COLOR

On a day blazing with spring,
when Monet's canvas slowly would ignite,
or in the heart of summer, when Seurat
discerned the molecules of massive humans
and set down each, or when, on days like this,
Pissarro nudged the sky toward beige and mauve,
Redon, instead, would set down what he saw.
Intricate networks, shadings, organisms,
all black as nerves, would monstrously evolve.
Examining under the mind's microscope
the organs, cells, and nuclei of a spider
that strode toward him grotesquely smiling,
of a chimera swimming like a shrimp
with the face of one's consumptive younger brother,

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"His monsters," said Pasteur, "are fit to live."
Mallarmé, worshipping the soaring eye
whose goal could only be the infinite,
declared, "His blacks are royal as purples."

On this grayest day, he woke to color. His flowers
no longer had the faces of new widows,
but stamens, pistils, all their apparatus;
no longer grew half submerged in the sea,
but flourished in, of all places, their vase;
no longer shone white light through black-lined features,
but shook with all the wavelengths of the spectrum,
vibrating, knocking in his cranium
so that unless Redon grabbed hold of canvas
and oils, and bore the bouquet in the world,
they would explode. He told Émile Bernard,
who said, "So, you admit the world, you want
finally to record it, you confess
Monet's genius?" "What world?" said Redon.

So he began to paint. Light darkened, quickened
in the studio; the spectrum of grays
from white to black rained on his hand and canvas.
His palette shook with perceivable fragments
of pure light, made objective by the prism
of his mind. Jonquils, iris, daffodils,
nasturtiums, roses bloomed under the brush
in a bouquet that took no flower for truth,
but from whose colors, textures, and mingled scents
all biological specimens might learn.
They grew to their full voluptuousness
as light failed, as Redon brought brush
with color and color and color to them,
color that would refuse to sleep at night,
always keeping from him mere light of day.

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Diana Pinto

LETTER FROM PARIS: VIVE LA RÉPUBLIQUE

More than three years after having come to power, and with the coming elections in 1986, it is time to examine not only the goals and ideals of French socialism, but also its place in history. How have the socialists weathered the consequences of their economic policies and the austerity and realism which have characterized the regime since March 1983? The socialists under the Fifth Republic for the first time must bear the responsibility for their own structural reforms, rather than simply manage "capitalism" while awaiting the heady days of a revolutionary conquest of power. The minimalist-maximalist logic of every left-wing French government in this century has lost meaning now that power is in the hands of the left for seven long years.

The identity challenge for the socialists is threefold. Inside their own political family, they must find a new political-cultural basis around which to unite the party and to give once more a sense of mission to disgruntled militants, for whom reality cannot compare with the socialist dream. If they hope to win the next elections, the socialists must appeal to a wider constituency, enlarging their message so as to capture once more those forces on the center left which voted for Mitterrand in May 1981, largely against Giscard. Beyond purely electoral considerations, socialism with a seven-year lease can go down in history only if it is identified with a progressive national project and not simply with structural reforms destined for *le peuple de gauche.*

To fulfill these goals, the socialists must answer the impressive arguments of an increasingly strong liberal-libertarian current which has blossomed in opposition by feeding on the internal contradictions and totalitarian past of the left. This new liberalism is no longer a marginal defensive position, but has become highly visible. Its key words, "marketplace," "individualism," "less State," have permeated the political scene, and influence most social debates. It is no accident that in an attempt to forge a new image for socialism, Max Gallo, the former spokesman for the government, should entitle his book, *La Troisième alliance: pour un nouvel individualisme.* "Individualism" was a word which would have made no sense in official socialist writings as little as three years ago. Today, any new defini-

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tion must take it into account if only to attack it. The arrival on the political scene of the very young Laurent Fabius as prime minister, with his moderate and pragmatic orientation, marks an attempt on the part of the socialists to turn their backs on three years of populist rhetoric incarnated by Pierre Mauroy. But will his presence substantially solve the socialist identity crisis?

The past is not dead and buried in French consciousness, and nowhere is it more alive than inside the left, whose every action seems to take place with the French Revolution as a backdrop. It is therefore not surprising that French socialism would seek its new cultural political identity not in the future (as Giscard had done), despite the government's fascination with modern technology, but in the past, more precisely in the venerable tradition of *La République.*

The term *La République* does not stand for the French Revolution after the beheading of Louis XVI, or for the short-lived revolutionary replay of 1848. In French political consciousness, *La République* is the Third Republic, more precisely its first constitutive half from 1875 up to World War I. During this period, the Third Republic slowly fashioned a national consensus against the monarchist right and against the Church in the name of progressive democracy and equality based on the "1789" heritage of the French Revolution (the Rights of Man). The "1793" heritage (Robespierre and the Terror) was laid aside when not discarded by a republic which had condemned the 1871 Paris Commune.

The return to the tradition of *La République* among present-day socialists is thus politically and culturally significant. It marks an attempt on all sides (*La Deuxième Gauche* as well as CERES, and all the more so the Mitterrandistes in power) to find meaning for their governing beyond the daily stumbling blocks of economic reality, not in fruitless revolutionary quests, but in a project of national solidarity and social progress based on hallowed republican institutions, foremost among which is the State and its noble emanation, "Le Service Public."

The loose constellation of left-wing antitotalitarian, anti-*dirigiste* social innovators who advocated economic rigor and modernity in international competition—known as *La Deuxième Gauche*—suffered the greatest loss of cultural-political identity from the socialist experience of power. The economic rigor may have succeeded under Jacques Delors, but the social utopias have failed, and the critical role of *La Deuxième Gauche* was increasingly taken over by a dynamic neoliberal camp.

La Deuxième Gauche, however, faced its greatest setback in social

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terms. It had based its innovative social ideas against the presence of politics and the powerful presence of the State, on the role of social activists, socialist militants, community forces, and trade unions. But these forces, once the left had come to power, proceeded to fight for ever narrower and more selfish interests, instead of fostering a new democratic spirit in which the "general will" could triumph. *La Deuxième Gauche* had relied on greater democracy and individual responsibility to produce a more dynamic civil society.

Because of its intellectual emphasis on the autonomy of civil society, its opposition to *le tout politique*, its approval of multiple poles of authority, *La Deuxième Gauche* found itself in a highly dubious position vis-à-vis the neoliberal democratic currents on the other half of the left-right divide. Strengthened by their stay in the opposition, neoliberals such as Yves Cannac, Guy Sorman, Michel Cicurel, could argue on behalf of the liberal marketplace, the need for a less overwhelming state, the transparence of economic life, greater social flexibility and openness, and the responsibility of individuals in relation to the public sector. Furthermore, their argument in favor of staying within the international community has been perceived as virtually identical to those of *La Deuxième Gauche*, if carried to its logical conclusions. In order to expand their audience and intellectual legitimacy, the neoliberals stressed at first the link with *La Deuxième Gauche*, thus pinning its back against the wall, in an intellectual "embrace" it had tried to elude for political and psychological reasons of deep historical identity.

Because *La Deuxième Gauche* could not bring itself to be identified with the market mechanism as the regulator of society (even though it admitted its central role), because it could not equate its criticism of the state with that of the liberals, and because in its mind civil society was more than the sum of its individual actors, it slowly moved toward a greater appreciation of the state as the ultimate mediator of society. In the words of Paul Thibaud, "L'État est aussi instrument de prise de conscience, d'éclaircissement et de suscitation."

Contact with power destroyed the ideological edifice of the First Left (the revolutionary, Jacobin one), as it broke the romantic, critical spirit of the Second Left. In power, hard pragmatism has had to supplant facile ideological categories, but pragmatism has never been enough as a French political category. Only a noble ideal could sustain the socialist family, just as the notion of "grandeur" had served de Gaulle. The socialists came to power, in the words of Jacques

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Julliard, "avec un programme obsolete, conçu avant la crise économique et avant la crise theorique." They had to abandon it, and the best replacement was a long step back into *La République* as a way of getting a firm grip on French reality in order to leap into France's modernity.

But at a deeper historical and cultural level, references to *La République* are highly ambiguous for the socialists and may prove to be a double-edged sword. The Third Republic included after all both the left *and* the non-monarchical right, around a "centrist" line. Thus, French liberals and Gaullists can also claim allegiance to the republic, while pitting its traditions against those of the socialists. Political tensions, rather than being lessened, actually can be exacerbated by the republican reference.

The Third Republic, unlike the Revolution, marks a quintessentially *French* chapter of French history. Its revival by the socialists may be construed as a lowering of international sights after the heady days of 1981, when Mitterrand sought to reshuffle the international world order. The return of *La République* marks above all a way of giving France once more a national goal and identity while sheltering her culturally and politically from the international maelstroms where, unfortunately, she must remain economically. Economics were never central to the Republican synthesis. *La République* therefore suits perfectly a French left which claims that *both* economic liberalism and Marxism failed as models for modernity, since they gave too much supremacy to the economic sphere. With *La République*, the road is wide open for "new" historical and humanist symbols of progress with which to dot France's already thickly populated cultural landscape.

François Mitterrand will thus lead France toward the bicentennial of the French Revolution and the year 2000, clad in the armor of the Third Republic, accompanied by the "living" presence of Gambetta, Ferry, Jaures, Clemenceau, Blum, Mendes, and de Gaulle . . . and a cortege of robots and computers. If one wants to look at the future in France, one has to realize it resides in the past.

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COMMENT

Kathleen Agena

OUT OF AFRICA . . .

In recent months, bleak images of famine-struck Ethiopians have gripped the world and prompted a flurry of emergency relief efforts in the West. For the most part, drought has been singled out as the culprit behind the tragedy. But this notion, widely disseminated through the mass media, is both mistaken and harmful. First, by obscuring the actual causes behind the widespread famine, it obstructs the enactment of genuine remedies to the crisis. Secondly, by implying that the situation is a natural, rather than a manmade, disaster, the exclusive focus on relief actions risks backfiring when, despite the media hoopla and large outlays of relief aid, conditions worsen when the drought ends (as it has now in Ethiopia).

Even at the United Nations, where rhetoric and reality are usually at odds, the drought's part in provoking the crisis was relegated to its rightful, i.e., marginal, role: "We all know," said Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, "that climatic conditions, no matter how unfavorable, are not sufficient in themselves to explain the extent and intensity of the African crisis." In view of the fact that the conditions now threatening two-thirds of the African continent with massive and extended famine have been evident for over a decade, the Secretary-General's speech was hardly news to the diplomatic corps. It did, however, reflect an important political shift. Rhetoric about "neocolonialism" and ideologically cooked up dichotomies (rich nations versus poor nations, haves versus have nots) were strikingly absent, even among the African diplomats' speeches.

In fact, the African crisis has been brewing for two decades. Average per capita income in the developing African nations has been dropping steadily in the twenty years since most African states gained independent status, according to World Bank statistics. Growth rates (GNP) have been stagnant or, in recent years, negative. Export earnings have declined sharply, while imports (particularly of food), have climbed at a staggering rate. Moreover, basic infrastructure (roads, railways sewage systems), formerly maintained

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and constructed by the colonial powers, has deteriorated badly, leading many development experts to the disheartening realization that "Africa is less developed now than it was twenty years ago," as one official from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund puts it.

This mind-boggling scenario has taken shape despite massive outlays of foreign aid. World Bank disbursements to Africa doubled between 1979 and 1983, and aid from the U.N. Development Program quadrupled between 1972 and 1981. Similar exponential increases were typical among a host of other multilateral agencies, including the Food and Agricultural Organization, World Health Organization, UNICEF, and others. Official aid from the U.S (not counting nonprofit agencies) came to 340 million dollars in 1984, and tripled to 935 million dollars by April 1985. Estimates of total worldwide foreign aid to Africa (from both official and nonprofit agencies) have ranged between sixty and eighty *billion* dollars annually over the past decade.

On the surface, these data reflect a disturbing trend, namely as foreign aid increased, internal development in Africa declined. What happened? In part, the fault lay in an incoherent, ill-conceived aid process. Funding generally went toward narrowly defined, single shot projects that had no impact in upgrading local manpower skills or generating more prosperity at the grass roots level. Moreover, there was no coordination among aid projects, and few, if any, methods for long-term follow up or evaluation. Often, aid was used for projects that were totally incompatible with existing infrastructure and development needs—resulting in modern communications satellites towering over regions without safe water, or hydroelectric dams built with no manpower to maintain them and no electric utility network linked to the new generator.

Even so, foreign aid flows at the recipient's, not the donor's, request. While an aid agency may exert leverage in shaping a project requested by a recipient nation, it cannot foist a predefined aid package on a country that is requesting aid for something else. No rhetorical magician can disguise the fact that Africa's tragic plight is primarily due to irresponsible policies enacted by the African states themselves. Such policies resulted in a facade of development while ignoring, and often directly obstructing, the seeds of genuine prosperity. Indeed, while the signs of oncoming disaster loomed ever larger, the international diplomatic community by and large remained silent, mostly due to mistaken vanity, fear of being judged insensitive to Africa's colonial past, or, worse, racist, gagged other-

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wise valid, and urgently needed, calls for reform. At the same time, African diplomats became skilled in playing upon liberal guilt while pointing the finger of blame at a mélange of external forces. Repeated often enough, these fabrications took on the aura of scriptural truth. In fact, they were political inventions, glamorized within a Third World mythology, the fundamental oracles of which went as follows:

Myth #1: *We are poor because you are rich. Send us capital, and we will be rich, too.* This myth, widely known as the "transfer of wealth" concept, has dominated the international diplomatic arena since it was first articulated in the 1960s. The champion of the concept was Raul Prebisch, an Argentinian diplomat who for two decades was the scourge of the industrial nations and was the architect of the U.N.'s "new international economic order," a systematic model for implementing the transfer of wealth approach. (As Peter Berger has pointed out, the basis of this myth seems to lie in Proudhon's dictum that wealth is theft. Like all uncritical leftist theory, it focuses exclusively on redistributing capital while ignoring the more fundamental problem of capital production.) Recently, however, Mr. Prebisch himself has debunked this myth. In sharp attacks on the developing nations, he now argues that there is enough capital in most of these countries, but bloated governments, wasteful spending, overvalued currencies, irresponsible policies, and rampant corruption are stifling genuine development. Mr. Prebisch's recent criticisms have not attracted the media spotlight, as did his former views, probably because they offer no easy solutions. Besides, the idea that we are to blame for the degrading conditions in the developing world—or that capital transfusions alone could remedy them—is more palatable than the recognition that, without internal reforms, external aid measures will only have a short-lived, superficial impact.

Myth #2: *Neocolonialism is robbing us of our wealth. If we could eliminate foreign capitalists, we would prosper.* Significantly, this myth did not arise within the developing nations themselves, but was articulated by left-wing academic theorists, many of whom never set foot inside a developing nation. Ask the poor within these countries what they think about this notion, and you will get the same response that South Africa's Zulu tribe chief gave to recent U.S. Congressional calls for the pull-out of American corporations from that country, namely that the presence of foreign investment and commercial enterprises is beneficial, not harmful.

The premise behind this myth is elusive. It arises, in part, from literalist interpretations of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which imply

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that knowledge and advancement are evil signs of a fall from a mindless state of grace. (Recently, however, James Hillman has argued that this notion is typical of all cultural traditions and is associated with what he refers to as the archetype of the child, using a Jungian analysis.) The facts are that greed—focused on acquisitions of cattle, wives, etc.—famine, disease, authoritarian tribal hierarchies, and the usual shopping list of human ills and sins existed in these countries prior to the arrival of Western corporations, and that a convincing argument can be made that the presence of these companies has lessened the sharp iniquities existing in these countries, opening doors to the lower classes that, otherwise, would have remained shut.

Foreign companies generate revenues and grass roots income that otherwise would be nonexistent, and in the vast majority of cases, the host government or local private interests own fifty percent or more of all foreign enterprises. The skills and training provided by these companies to local manpower could not, at this stage, be acquired through other means. The loss of foreign investment and commercial enterprises—due to political instability and deteriorating infrastructure—in recent years has meant a devastating blow to many African economies. While GNP is by no means the only indicator of a society's prosperity, no one who views the inhumane conditions of poverty in these countries could sanely argue that the solution lies in eliminating the sources of revenue that are there.

Myth #3: *Reliance on cash crop agriculture and exploitation of our resources by the rich nations is the cause of hunger in Africa and throughout the Third World.* Like the preceding myths, the logic here, in part, seems to be that the world is producing its limit of food, and those whose plates are full must be depriving others of their sustenance. First, it should be pointed out that estimates of the Food and Agricultural Organization, among others, indicate that Africa could be producing three to four times its current food supply—enough to feed its population several times over and still allow for healthy exports. Secondly, it should be obvious that American farmers rely on cash crops. The difference here is that the farmers, not the state, receive the profits from their labor, and an open market ensures crop diversity. Thirdly, the premise of this myth is that flourishing agricultural economies existed in Africa and the rest of the Third World until Western capitalists moved in and created hunger. But, as the Costa Rican political scientist Luis Burstein has articulately argued without Western agricultural enterprises in Third World countries, these countries would have less food and lower GNPs than they do now. The cause of the man-made famine in Africa today is directly linked to national policies that harshly mitigated against agriculture: first, by stressing urbanization and indus-

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> trialization as the quick road to development and, secondly, by state-imposed controls that kept food prices artificially low. Small farmers were driven out of business and either fled to urban slums or retreated to farming subsistence plots. Only the large, predominantly state-owned cocoa and coffee farms could afford to remain in business, and when commodity prices for these goods dropped, many of these farms were abandoned as well. To turn this disaster around will not only require government-sponsored subsidies (probably to be funded by multilateral aid agencies) and other incentives to lure urban populations back to the farms, it will also demand a clearly articulated renunciation of a decade of state-indoctrinated cultural cliches that typified grass roots farmers as "peasants," second-class citizens in nations now dominated by urban slums.

In addition to punitive economic agricultural policies, African states have, for over a decade, been ignoring the warnings of the U.N. Environment Program, United Nations Sudano Sahelian Office, and other agencies, with respect to enacting responsible extension services to halt agricultural soil degradation and desertification. Without firm commitment from the indigenous African governments, the efforts that have been made, by external agencies, to remedy this situation simply fall apart as soon as the foreign technicians fly home. Moreover, the spread of desertification, according to recent climatology theories, increases the likelihood of drought. (Desertification increases the reflective surface, or "albedo," of the Earth; as albedo increases, precipitation levels decline. Many climatologists are now suggesting that the extent and rapidity of encroaching desertification on the African continent may be altering global climate patterns, and be among the factors contributing to the abnormal drought affecting the eastern United States.) Like the renewal of American prairie land after the 1930s dust bowl, basic soil conservation methods can turn this catastrophic situation around, *but* they will demand a decade of concerted political action within the African states.

As for external aid, it should be clear that lagging development in no way benefits the industrialized democracies, that foreign aid to upgrade development ultimately improves the worldwide economy and enhances global security. In the future, however, the focus will shift away from large-scale, macro-enterprise projects toward the micro-enterprise level—aimed at offering incentives to small-scale farmers, businesses, and local entrepreneurs. Increasingly, pro-

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grams that upgrade manpower training—education, health care, agricultural extension services, small business management skills, etcetera—will be funded rather than state-orchestrated public works policies.

In the past five years, innovative collaborations between nonprofit groups like Africare or Partners for Productivity and Western corporations have had an immediate and extensive impact in areas such as improving nationwide health care delivery services and obtaining local, grass roots food self-sufficiency in Africa and other developing countries. In large part, these efforts succeeded because they bypassed funneling capital through national state bureaucracies. The success of these programs, and the failure of state-sponsored projects in the past, have implications that go beyond the African crisis. They suggest that enlightened capitalism is a more viable method for achieving what, traditionally, would have been viewed as socialist ideals than is applied socialism or its variant, the top-heavy welfare state. Repeatedly, food lines and shortages become the daily routine in socialist economies and, unlike the United States, do not exist in demographic pockets of hunger, but nationwide. Moreover, because the economic engines have been throttled, no nonprofit groups, which depend on private donations, can step in to alleviate the situation.

This is not to imply that generation of private capital is a solution to a society's ills, but rather to suggest that both traditional socialist and capitalist theories run amuck for the same reason. Both confuse a symbolic means with an ideal end: state appropriation of private goods is no remedy for human alienation, and unrestrained pursuit of economic gain is a form of tyranny, not liberation, of the individual. Whether one is speaking of relief aid to Africa or welfare handouts here, capital alone will not solve the problem. By facing the tragic outcome of such wrong-headed ideological intoxications on a distant continent, we may learn, like the ancient historians, something new out of Africa.

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BOOKS

ELIOT AND KAFKA

T. S. Eliot: A LIFE. By Peter Ackroyd. Simon and Schuster. $24.95.
THE NIGHTMARE OF REASON: A LIFE OF FRANZ KAFKA. By Ernst Pawel. Random House $25.50.

Firstrate critical biographies are scarce at any time. But by some rare coincidence, two superb ones of perhaps the two most dominating figures of modern writing were published last year. Peter Ackroyd's biography is the first full-length life of Eliot. Ernst Pawel's is the latest but by far the fullest and the best in a long line of books about Kafka.

Eliot and Kafka were as different as two contemporary writers could be. But they had some things in common. Eliot, in my opinion, despite recent efforts to downgrade him, is the most influential and representative modern poet and critic; Kafka, I think, is the most powerful modern writer, whose life as well as his work goes to the heart of modern experience, of our own experience. They had other things in common: Eliot had an agonized life, and his poetry was, in part at least, the deployment of that agony; Kafka's life was a torture which he transformed into his fiction. But they were separated by a cultural and personal chasm. Eliot was an Anglo-Saxon hybrid, a middle-class American with an elite education and a marginal sensibility finding a niche in the bohemian byways of the British upper class. Kafka was a Czech Jew, navigating through the tensions between his Jewishness and the minority existence of the Czechs on the one side, and the larger world of German and international literature on the other. And because of the pressures of Kafka's family life, as well as the oppressiveness of the traditional culture surrounding him, his neurotic and intellectual needs combined, both in his life and his work, in an ambivalent struggle against authority. Eliot, on the other hand, because of the disorder he found in himself and in democratic society as a whole, engaged in a lifelong search for order. Kafka's fiction vainly sought some moral authority—perhaps in the form of God—while succumbing to authority through guilt. Eliot's poetry dramatically reflected the chaos of his own life and shaped it into that of modern existence—especially in the earlier poems—while asserting the authority of religion.

Ackroyd's biography is a masterpiece of sophisticated inquiry

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into Eliot's life, in keeping with the British critical climate and the temper of his subject. Ackroyd is also remarkably astute in assessing the less successful of Eliot's works, but here, too, he does so quietly—without any gratuitous pleasure in discovering a writer's failings. Thus Ackroyd indicates that the later poems are not as good as the earlier ones, corroborating my sense that *The Four Quartets*, for example, which are an extraordinary *tour de force*, seem to be somewhat willed. Ackroyd also notes the mechanical and abstract quality of the plays. Though contrary to much popular opinion, this is a judgement with which I agree. It seems clear to me that Eliot simply was not a natural dramatist.

Ackroyd is not original, but very adroit and modulated as he weaves the life and the work together. (His book was written without the cooperation of Valerie, Eliot's widow, and he had no access to unpublished documents and manuscripts.) Not much is known about the second marriage to Valerie, except that it has been officially declared to have been happy. But Akroyd has gathered a good deal of information about the first marriage to Vivien, which was a modern mess, and Eliot's uneasy relation to women did not help, although Vivien herself hovered on the borders of pathology. The recent play about Eliot (which I have not seen) purportedly wallows in this marital swamp, raising once more the question of how far we have to dig into the lives of prominent people. We know that Eliot did not want a biography, either for sound critical reasons or for squeamish ones, perhaps both—who knows? I suppose some of the inside story should be known, if it throws any light on the work. But how much? Possibly the line should be drawn at scandal-mongering. In his criticism, Eliot played down the significance of biographical material, concentrating mostly on the text, and in this respect he was the forerunner of the New Criticism. But there is some ambiguity and suggestiveness beyond purely theoretical considerations in Eliot's formulations. In *The Sacred Wood*, an early collection of essays, Eliot spoke of the impersonality of poetry: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality." Still, what he escaped from reverberates through his poetry. At the same time, this and similar statements throughout Eliot's criticism could be read as a declaration of poetic doctrine, signalling the reaction against the more personal poetry of the romantics and the turn to classicism.

The relative merits of modern poets and critics have been argued endlessly. But to my mind, the measure of Eliot's stature is

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that, more than any other writer, he shifted the sensibility of modern poetry and the direction of modern criticism. Eliot's earlier poetry, particularly, found an "objective correlative" in Eliot's own idiom of the mood and the images of modern life—resembling in this respect the combination of inner and outer world so characteristic of Kafka's achievement. In his critical writing, Eliot's drive toward order led him to extreme positions, even to a kind of esthetic anti-Semitism early in his career, which we cannot excuse or explain away; but it is worth noting that he was right about the disorder of life in the democratic West—prophetically so. Yet at his best Eliot established a model of incisiveness and textual awareness for contemporary criticism. In bad times, each age and each culture gets the writer it deserves; in good times they get the writer they need. Eliot filled this need for the Anglo-American world in the early modernist period.

Pawel's biography of Kafka, masterful in its own way, is quite different from Ackroyd's. It lacks Ackroyd's British suavity and moderation, but it is an exhaustive and judicious account of both Kafka's life and work. For one thing, while preserving the lonely, melancholy, neurasthenic picture of Kafka, it makes clear that he was neither a loner nor a literary eccentric, by placing him in the intellectual world of Prague, Vienna, and Berlin. Perhaps unjustifiably, the picture we got from Brod, Kafka's friend and first biographer, and from other writings about Kafka, is of a person turned inward, a symbolic if not entirely a real hermit, whose life was the sum of his neuroses and his obsessive writing, which, Kafka proclaimed, made his life more bearable. Pawel, however, makes us realize how much he was not only intellectually but socially a part of his culture. He knew most of his literary contemporaries and read widely in European and American literature. He was also aware of most of the movements of his day, some of which he supported, some of which he dismissed. This gives us a truer sense of his work: dispelling the romantic notion that it was spun simply out of his sufferings and his dreams, and the psychologized one that literature can be just a projection of self. Pawel's book helps us to see that without the example of *literature*, Kafka could not convert personal experience into *literature*. Where else could that impeccable prose have come from—that uncanny use of language to fuse private feelings with worldly vision, detail of observation with moral generalization, dark obsessions with light and witty perceptions. How else could a neurotic—or psychotic—Czech Jew become part of the mainstream of modern lit-

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erature? How else could his personal obsessions become parables of the modern predicament?

One of the things that makes Pawel's book so sound is his aversion to academic critics, who play games with Kafka's "text," and to the deconstructionists, who create a new one. Their zealous "interpretations" have even shrunk Kafka — as the subhero of *Metamorphosis* was dehumanized — into a God-seeker, a Zionist, an atheist, a purveyor of guilt, an exposer of bureaucracy, a prophet of totalitarianism, a writer of case histories. The fact is that Kafka's fiction has many meanings and that they fade into each other, perhaps more so than in any other modern writer, because of the ambiguity with which he looked at every human question. His main themes — guilt, anguish, fear of and attraction to authority, ambivalence about women — blend into and work against each other like the themes in a Bach fugue. The very wealth of detail uncovered by Pawel precludes simple explanations and makes us even more aware of the overwhelming complexity of Kafka's writing as well as of his life.

We also get a fuller picture of Kafka's unresolved relations with the various women he almost married. Earlier portraits suggested only anguish and revulsion when marriage seemed imminent. But the complete story reveals periods of exacerbated, almost manic passion toward the women who found it hard to enter or to leave his life. It should be noted, too, that Pawel makes use of psychoanalytic insights in probing Kafka's psychic disorders, but he does so with admirable moderation, thus avoiding the clinical reductions of much psychoanalytic criticism.

One fault of Pawel's book should not go unnoticed: the writing is occasionally off key, and words awkwardly chosen, but it is a minor blemish that might have been removed by a good copy editor. Unfortunately, one is made particularly aware of this failing in a book about a writer whose prose did not have a single false note — not even in his letters and diaries.

Though not explicitly, both books raise questions about the purpose of biography. It is usually assumed that aside from satisfying our curiosity about famous people's lives, particularly if there are dark secrets, biography provides clues to a writer's work. But biographies such as these two about Eliot and Kafka have an added dimension. They carry us back to the golden age of modernism, dominated by those large figures who towered over their contemporaries. And in getting a close-up of that extraordinary and

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mysterious quality we loosely call genius, one experiences a kind of intellectual excitement—as though one's own mind is being elevated.

Such is the overwhelming esthetic effect of the biographies of Eliot and Kafka that I found myself becoming nostalgic for a time when broad literary questions were central to our concerns. But this may have more to do with my biography than theirs.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

IN DEFENSE OF THE IMAGINATION

THE LAND OF ULRO. By Czeslaw Milosz. Translated by Louis Iribarne. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $16.95.

Since becoming an émigré in 1951, Milosz the essayist has written basically two kinds of books, distinctly different as regards their implied readers and rhetorical techniques. The first kind of book, represented by *The Captive Mind*, *Native Realm*, or the recent *Witness of Poetry*, is addressed primarily to a Western audience. The chief intent of such books is to break down certain mental barriers, to open new vistas by revealing the unique perspective of an outsider-participant, someone who bridges East and West with his individual experience. As a consequence, the nature of these books is paradoxical: while they are—like everything Milosz writes—utterly personal, they also have to be more or less didactic. The other kind, exemplified (to draw on only those works in English translation) by *Visions from San Francisco Bay*, seems to be closer to the traditional genre of "a writer's notebook"; if Milosz has in mind any specific reader here, it is a reader intimately acquainted with the author's background, a reader who has shared much of the author's experience and therefore needs less explanation and instruction.

The Land of Ulro does its best to belong to this second category. Its American edition, though it is excellently translated and footnoted by Louis Iribarne, begins with a straightforward warning: "Dear reader," writes Milosz in a specially added Preface, "this book was not intended for you (. . .) When writing it, I indulged in a personal whim, dismissing in advance the idea of its publication in English (. . .) I gave free rein to my meditations and didn't try to

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reach anybody in particular, except perhaps a few fastidious people able to read my Polish and belonging to the same circle of the literati."

In fact, even Polish critics were perplexed when the book first appeared in the original. When I myself read it back in 1978, I felt overwhelmed and dazed not only by its unconstrainedly meandering manner of presentation, which moves in sudden leaps and turns from one name, epoch or country to another, but also by the completely new set of ideas and problems it opened to me. I can foresee the same kind of feeling in the American reader. Regardless of cultural differences, we all instinctively expect that an essayistic book, original as it may be, will, at least to some degree, fit into one or another ideological pigeonhole; we want to place it somewhere on our pocket map, the four quarters of which are usually "left" versus "right" and "conservative" versus "progressive." Milosz shakes off all these labels. "I am fighting," he says at one point, "for the right to exercise my mind outside accepted disciplines"; ". . . and ideological categories," we might add.

This is possible because the point of departure for *The Land of Ulro* is personal and autobiographical, though the book deals with nothing less than problems in the intellectual history of Western civilization. Through asking in the very beginning "Who was I?" and "Who am I now, years later?" Milosz ostensibly tries to elucidate the reasons for his own evolution; since it so happens, however, that the questions he constantly asks himself are questions that centuries of our civilization have tried to answer, his treatise on himself soon becomes a treatise on a certain current of thought, a certain neglected philosophical tradition.

This tradition's invisible thread, which in Milosz's book links such seemingly distant figures as Emmanuel Swedenborg, William Blake, Fedor Dostoevsky, the Polish romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz or the French symbolist (and Milosz's relative) Oskar W. Milosz, is the perennial question of *unde malum*, of the origins of evil. Even before Milosz began to search for an answer in the works of philosophers, ranging from the Manichaeans and Gnostics to Lev Shestov and Simone Weil, he had become obsessed by the irresolvable problem of how to reconcile the presence of evil with the notion of Providence. This obsession resulted in his lifelong attitude of paradoxical "ecstatic pessimism." But it also made him sensitive to the fact that Western civilization had for at least two centuries been bypassing the central paradoxes of human existence on earth and

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simplifying the human world into what Blake called the land of Ulro.

Ulro is "the land of the disinherited," "a land where man is reduced to a supererogatory number, worse, where he becomes as much for himself, in his own eyes, in his own mind." Following Blake, Milosz sees the beginnings of the process of such disinheritance in the Age of Enlightenment with its fundamentally wrong decision to put all of mankind's hopes in the triumphs of science and reason. The times of Bacon, Locke and Newton witnessed the first signs of a rapidly widening rift between the inner world of the human imagination and the outer world of science's abstract laws. The ensuing romantic crisis of European culture, which has continued to our time, has been, in Milosz's view, a phenomenon contained within the walls of the land of Ulro; only a handful of prophetic seers have attempted, in both literature and philosophy, to seek some effective way out, usually at the risk of being perceived as "abnormal," incomprehensible or excessively mystical.

But how do their efforts relate to the question of *unde malum*? One common denominator Milosz finds between these thinkers and his own intellectual inclinations is the notion of anthropocentrism combined with a "bias against Nature." In other words, those who try to bring down the walls of Ulro must consider man the center of the universe while being perfectly aware that there is no such thing as innate human goodness. Nature is not a harmoniously working mechanism, as the deists of the Age of Enlightenment liked to imagine it, nor is it a refuge from the troubles of civilization, as post-Rousseau romantics tended to think. On the contrary, Nature, including human nature, is branded by the unavoidable presence of evil. Whoever realizes this must deem it impossible to create any system of ethics free of religious sanctions. The only way to create an intellectual space which a human society could inhabit is to reconcile the presence of evil with the notion of a providential plan by introducing the idea of "Godmanhood." Not deified man, but just the opposite, humanized God, is the concept through which we can "assent to our existence on earth." Within such a vision, Christ, as in Swedenborg, becomes identical with God the Father and the moment of Creation is simultaneous with that of the Crucifixion; the God who created the world with all its evil and suffering is the God who also agreed to participate in our pain, who "took on a human form and willingly died the death of a tortured prisoner."

Swedenborg, Blake, Mickiewicz, Dostoevsky, O. W. Milosz

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were thinkers who, for all their human limitations and errors, had enough visionary power to give the notion of divine humanity or "Godmanhood" pride of place in their systems of thought—even to the point of, in Dostoevsky's radical phrase, "choosing Christ over truth" (i.e., over the abstract truth of science). Our century, on the other hand, is viewed by Milosz as living proof of "the utter failure of secular humanism, a failure sponsored by the very successes of that same humanism." Ours is the world disinherited of values, the world whose inner void can be—and is—too easily filled with worthless and often antihuman ideological substitutes. The road of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor seems to be taken time and again.

Such a diagnosis does not mean, though, that Milosz readily dismisses every form of agnosticism or atheism as simply disguises for ethical relativism. On the contrary, his polemic with Witold Gombrowicz—which makes an extremely illuminative reading not only for the student of Polish literature—shows that he fully appreciates the kind of atheism which is "bound by the strictest ethical code" exactly because it does not admit the possibility of divine intervention or posthumous reparation. "Morally speaking," says Milosz, "there is nothing, in my view, which argues either for Christians or against atheists (. . .) I would even say that if someone can be an atheist, he ought to be one." Would that mean, in turn, that religion can be reduced to the role of a means of intellectual self-defense against an ethical void? Such a concept of religion, albeit theologically rather unorthodox, seems indeed to be quite close to Milosz's views. In fact, his book is a treatise on what Blake called "Divine Works of the Imagination"; it finds a possible remedy to the modern crisis of Christian civilization not merely in a reanimation of the religious spirit but, more demandingly, in broadening the sphere of imagination and thus reclaiming the abandoned space of the human world.

It is to be expected that *The Land of Ulro* will stir up a great deal of controversy among its American readers. Some of this book's concepts—such as the theocracy mentioned a few times as a possible model for societies of tomorrow—are indeed highly unpopular in this country's intellectual tradition. I myself am rather unconvinced, to say the least, by Milosz's overly categorical criticism of what he calls "secular humanism." It would be unfortunate, however, if such controversial details veiled in the readers' perception the more essential issues raised by his brilliant defense of the imagination and its humanizing power. The central problem of this book—the question

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of how civilization should deal with the individual's sense of insignificance in the universe—is no small matter, after all.

STANISLAW BARANCZAK

DOSTOEVSKY'S CRISES

PROBLEMS OF DOSTOEVSKY'S POETICS. By Mikhail Bakhtin. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson. Introduction by Wayne C. Booth. University of Minnesota Press. $35.00.
DOSTOEVSKY: THE YEARS OF ORDEAL, 1850–1859. By Joseph Frank. Princeton University Press. $25.00.

Considering the historical circumstances in which he lived, Mikhail Bakhtin's longevity (1895–1975) was not the least of his accomplishments. Although his death is less than a decade behind us and the attractive interpretive power of his open-ended and far-reaching ideas have only recently begun to make themselves felt, he was basically a man of the 1920s, that great period of transition, adjustment and maladjustment, carnival time, the Soviet Union of the NEP, with the sinister shadow of the 1930s at the edge of the horizon. Frances Yates, reviewing his book on Rabelais in the late 1960s, thought him a Marxist. Perhaps he was. Yet he was also a Christian, perhaps even Orthodox, but altogether free of sectarian narrowness or closure. A typical and favorite adjective of his was "unfinalizable," and he exults in what he calls "joyful relativity." He was, as his biographer Michael Holquist has put it, "the poet of openness."

His book on Dostoevsky first appeared in 1929, the year of Bakhtin's arrest, and a revised, expanded version was published in Moscow in 1963, shortly after his return from years of semi-exile in the East and Central Asia. An awkward English translation appeared in 1973. (It has since been republished by Ardis Press, with only a few corrections.) The present volume, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, more than makes good the frustrating inadequacies of the older version, even carrying the tone and inflections, the poetic flare-ups and occasional heaviness and repetitions of Bakhtin's authentic voice. She has translated as well Bakhtin's notes and drafts for his revision, has written a learned, perceptive preface and provided a glossary of exotic reference. In his introduction, Wayne Booth, in-

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trepid formalist critic, pays generous tribute both to the work of Emerson and the insights of Bakhtin, whose approach to literature has startled, if not exactly confounded, his own.

Until recently, Bakhtin has remained the property of specialists, some of whom took a dim view of his far-ranging, unconventional scholarship. Even his admirers tended to be isolated from each other. The Rabelais fans did not read the Dostoevsky book, and vice versa. When it became at least a matter of informed speculation that not only these two books, but also works previously attributed to names like Voloshinov and P. N. Medvedev and Kanaev were either authored by Bakhtin or closely inspired by him, and when Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson published their translation of his 1921–1941 essays (at least two of which were small books in themselves) in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin emerged to our literate public not only as a major scholar and literary theoretician, but also as one of the important thinkers of the twentieth century. His studies of Rabelais and Dostoevsky could then be seen not as ends in themselves but as partial articulations of a broad and powerful worldview in which they were privileged landmarks.

Bakhtin attributed enormous significance to art, and more specifically to the novel, as a mode of articulating human truths not accessible to formal-rational-philosophic discourse. "Novelness" is a central concept for him, and he tends to bring the weight of his astonishing erudition to bear on the entire history of verbal discourse to demonstrate this "novelness" and its emergence as the triumph of the word. In turn he sees the acme of "novelness" as something he calls the "polyphonic novel," first written, according to him, by Dostoevsky.

Central to "novelness" is an open-ended capacity to absorb and consolidate many different kinds and levels of discourse, many "languages," so to speak, as opposed to the relatively closed nature of "poetry" in which the poet tends to forge a single distinctive voice, his own "language." The distinctiveness of the polyphonic novel is its many-voicedness, taking "voice" to contain within itself as part of its meaning also "personality," "worldview," "ideology," and "consciousness," and the distinctive way of patterning these in expressive and communicative speech. In Dostoevsky's polyphony, the authorial voice is but one of many, with no distinctive hierarchical superiority over other voices. It is not simply the base from which the other voices emerge, or the keystone that structures the arch, or the central authoritative reference. It is a voice that engages other voices at key

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points, as they engage each other, but with no special privilege or prevailing authority.

Where voices meet and engage, there is dialogue. The engagement is creative and produces change, but it is not to be regarded as "dialectic." Indeed, dialogue is the opposite of dialectic. Nothing is "subsumed," multiplicity and openness rather than unity and closure are the product of this interaction and development. In more "monologic" or homophonic novels, like those of Tolstoy or Turgenev, many voices may be reproduced with sensitive detail, nuance and inflection—authentic voices—but they are "objectified," treated as objects, rather than endowed with a full, free and equal subjectivity.

The Soviet Dostoevsky scholar, G. M. Fridlender, has taken issue with Bakhtin on the notion of "polyphony," indicating in scrupulous detail a number of important places in Dostoevsky's novels where the authorial voice intervenes actively in the course of events. Yet Bakhtin never denied "intervention"—on the contrary, he stressed it. What Fridlender fails to demonstrate is the "finalizability" of that intervention. Yet it must be admitted that Bakhtin's notion of polyphony, attractive and productive as it is, retains something of the metaphysical. Cautious scholars, especially those who stress a "common sense" approach to literary texts are uneasy with it—René Wellek, for instance, or Joseph Frank, in the first volume of his Dostoevsky biography.

Russian thought has traditionally taken shape through the veil of literature. That is, thinking about the nature of reality has been expressed far more than elsewhere in terms of literary reference. Vladimir Soloviev is unthinkable without Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Merezhkovsky, Shestov, Berdiaev, Rozanov, all fashioned and expressed their worldviews *through* explications of texts by Dostoevsky, and other literary figures, too, of course, but Dostoevsky was central. In a way, Bakhtin belongs to this tradition, yet he also transcends it. As befits a philosopher of the word, he takes seriously the study of linguistics and literary theory. If there is anything distinctively un-Marxist about him, it is his distaste for the Hegelian dialectic, but his distaste is not based on ignorance. His great antagonist, after all, was Lukacs. Bakhtin's essay, "The Epic and the Novel" is a direct (if unstated) polemic with Lukacs, but indirectly and perhaps unintentionally, the polemic can be heard in many places in the work of both men.

As a sharp critic of the Russian formalists, Bakhtin at the same time absorbed their basic terminology and a good deal of their "professional" approach to literary texts. While they attempted, however,

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to autonomize, to seal off the literary text from its broader sociohistorical contexts, Bakhtin attempted to open it out. Literary scholarship, he insisted, must begin with the problem of genre, and genre he saw as a choice and deployment of words clustered around specific kinds of historical human experience and the objects associated with that experience. Bakhtin is not a provincial guru or a mystical seeker of the Russian soul. He is a religious thinker of formidable professional philosophical expertise and literary competence.

Bakhtin traces the generic sources of Dostoevsky's polyphony back to the early Platonic dialogues, to Menippean satire, to the European adventure novel and to the boulevard-adventure novel of Dostoevsky's own time. His erudite search is both extremely ingenious and convincing, especially with regard to the Menippea, that hybrid form in which high and low styles mingle, high and low society confront each other, people from different historical epochs anachronistically converse, the living with the dead, and Dostoevsky is seen to have roots in Lucian, Martial and Apuleius! Bakhtin "discovers" also an extraliterary source in carnival—along with "polyphony," one of his key concepts.

For Bakhtin, drawing heavily on Frazer and *The Golden Bough*, carnival is folk culture, long antedating Christianity and having its roots in preclass society as a celebration of the ongoing life of the community; or, rather, celebrating at the same time the death of the individual and his resurrection in the immortality of the group. The key image of carnival is "pregnant death," and it is celebrated as a "feast for all the world" in the public square. Its rituals involve pairings of opposites and also reversals—crownings and uncrownings, debasements and exaltations, fat-lean, male-female, king-fool, head-backside, womb-tomb, etc. Bakhtin sees the late Renaissance, the sixteenth century, as the latest great manifestation of carnival in Europe, and its disappearance, or rather its fragmentation and reduction as a public manifestation, with the establishment of absolute monarchy and the hardening of the class structure in the seventeenth century. Yet at the same time he sees a tranposition of the spirit of carnival, most completely in the work of Rabelais, into humanist literature, its "carnivalization." Carnivalization involves not only laughter (the forms of laughter are reduced), a celebration of the horizontal immortality of the folk, the equality of the public square, the fertility and abundance of the earth, but also a pulling down of established hierarchies and authorities, a celebration as well of "joyful relativity" for which many-voicedness is indispensable.

A third key concept of Bakhtin's is the chronotope. What he

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means by it is the way in which human experience of time and space is imagined. Dostoevsky's chronotope is a place where two or more consciousnesses meet, a liminal place, in a condition of crisis. Dostoevsky's crucial scenes take place on thresholds, platforms, stairways, crossroads, railroad stations, public squares, or living rooms that resemble public squares more closely than they do private quarters. And they take place at a time of crisis, when a whole lifetime is concentrated in the outcome of a moment. In Dostoevsky's novels, scandalous outbreaks and reversals, as well as an ubiquitous heteroglossia, carry the traces of carnival, while recurrent moments of crisis and climax belie the notion of a meaningful gradual unfolding in "biographical time" such as constitutes the chronotope characteristic of the bildungsroman or the novels of Tolstoy. Discontinuities, reversals, the perpetually unexpected, characterize Dostoevsky's as they do the traditional adventure novel. The image of gradual historical or biological maturation, as a *being* is seen to become more and more fully and truly *itself*, is absolutely foreign to a Dostoevsky novel, as it is central to Tolstoy.

Tolstoy is obsessed with death, and it is characteristic of him that he tries to get *inside* the experience of dying, to follow it by stream-of-consciouness techniques as in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Nothing could be more foreign to Dostoevsky, Bakhtin points out. His novels are full of violent deaths, whether by disease, murder or suicide. But these are always viewed from without, in terms of their impact on others. For Dostoevsky, Bakhtin claims, "personality," "consciousness," that which constitutes the "voice," that which interests him the most, is precisely what does not "die," but is seen to live on in the speech, external and internal, of others.

* * *

Coming to Joseph Frank's massive biography of Dostoevsky after reading Bakhtin, one cannot help reflecting on such matters as the crisis chronotope. Since the degree to which the pattern of Dostoevsky's life seems to follow that of his novels is striking, one must confront the fact that it is a life that does not easily lend itself to traditional biography. True, Frank wrote in the introduction to his first volume: ". . . I see Dostoevsky's work as a brilliant synthesis of the major issues of his time, a personal utterance to be sure, but one, more than most, oriented by concerns outside himself." He has therefore concentrated his efforts on Dostoevsky's relationship to the major social and intellectual movements of his time. In doing so, he ex-

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plains that "Dostoevsky" for him means basically "the work," the body of texts that carries that name. Frank's first concern is with the work, and he moves from there to the "relevant" events in the life, and from there to the major historical currents of which they were a part.

He is far too sophisticated a scholar not to be aware of the traditional pitfalls of the biographical fallacy, and he is reasonably wary, "sensible," about them. Perhaps common sense is too much his base. It sports oddly with a life like Dostoevsky's.

There are other pitfalls as well. For instance, no one has yet written a persuasive nonpartisan synthetic history of Russia for, say, the period that encompasses Dostoevsky's life and a little beyond, of a kind that is not uncommon for most of the countries of Western Europe. The crisis-chronotope seems there, too, to suggest itself, where events belie a gradual, logical unfolding through time, of some hidden but latent inner essence. Crises, with their accompanying emergent sense of the need for radical alternatives, may provoke not only desperate imaginative projections into the future, but also intense memory-searches of the distant past, both of which may seem to offer more than a sensible scrutiny of immediate contingencies. They emphasize break, rupture, rather than continuity. This, too, no doubt, has its logic; but it is not the logic of common sense. Bakhtin links Dostoevsky with Lucian and Apuleius, whom Dostoevsky may or may not have read, yet the trace of origins is strikingly there. Frank sticks to "the record," and is much better at explaining Dostoevsky's relationship to the Westerners and Slavophiles, to Belinsky and Balzac and Lamennais, Feuerbach and Carl Gustav Carus, than he is to St. Dmitry of Rostov, or for that matter, to Shakespeare whose presence in Dostoevsky's life (mentioned several times) remains unaccountable.

At least to some degree, and by an instinct that speaks well for him, Frank abandons a concern for continuity and balance, the logic of development, in favor of concentration on the great crises and reversals in Dostoevsky's life. In the first volume, he seemed to devote a disproportionate amount of space to correcting Freud's famous essay, "Dostoevsky and Parricide." Freud's essay, though negligible in the context of Freud's own work, has had a considerable influence on Dostoevsky scholarship. What matters, as Frank points out, is not whether or not Dostoevsky's father was in fact murdered by his peasants—it seems he died of apoplexy after all, but Dostoevsky believed nevertheless that he was murdered—but the precise

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nature of the guilt that event inspired in him. This has bearing on the ideological crisis later described in Volume Two at the time of Dostoevsky's *katorga*, and the transformed roles of peasantry and tsar in Dostoevsky's new set of commitments. In any case, the circumstances surrounding the death of Dostoevsky's father were worth the exploration-time Frank afforded them. Unfortunately, he devotes no corresponding time to the previous death of Dostoevsky's mother. The "record" is lacking, and he does not like to speculate.

Apart from the contretemps with Freud's essay, the first volume concentrates on Dostoevsky's astonishing public success with his first novel, his subsequent almost equally astonishing failures, his relationship to the Belinsky circle and to the Petrashevtsy. Frank is very good at describing the secularized religious atmosphere, the humanist-sentimental atmosphere of the Westernizing liberal-socialist circles of the 1840s, the differences within those circles, and their relationship to the Slavophiles on the one hand, and to the "nihilist" generation of the 1860s on the other. The great dramatic event of this period in Dostoevsky's life, his arrest, trial, mock-execution and exile to hard labor and Siberia, is amply there, but Frank tends to tone it down, and nothing much new is revealed.

The second volume, which covers the 1850s, poses a special problem for Frank. It is a period in which Dostoevsky wrote very little — two short, minor fictions toward the end of the period, two distinctly potboiler poems, and a few letters. Thus, it is difficult to move from the work to the life, unless one resorts to works produced at a later period and reads back from them, which is precisely what Frank does with *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1864), a detailed and *cautiously* speculative analysis of which becomes the centerpiece of the volume.

The difficult thing to explain is the marked shift in Dostoevsky's attitude during his term of hard labor and exile toward the peasantry (which in Russian is virtually the equivalent of the *narod*, the people or the folk) and tsarist authority. In the past, he had been condescending in a liberal way to the peasant, who, caught in the primitive ways of backward Russia, needed to be "helped." He had rebelled against tsarist authority as the mainstay of serfdom, an order he detested. The mystery is: how could his prison experience, during which he was appalled at the savagery and brutality of his fellow-convicts of the peasant class, during which they treated him as almost absolutely an outsider, an alien from a privileged class, during which he was for years at the mercy and caprice of a drunken and in-

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competent camp commandant, fully vested with tsarist authority, and during which the only real friends with whom he could hold discourse were Polish political prisoners—how could such an experience have effected such a change? Some scholars have resorted to the Freud essay and answered "masochism" or "repressed homosexuality." Frank is far more persuasive.

Dostoevsky was shocked by the brutality and ferocity of the peasant-convicts. At the same time, he was "greatly upset by the Polish abhorrence of the Russian peasant-convicts, whom they looked down upon with supreme contempt and refused to regard as anything but criminal riffraff." The attitude reminded him of his previous *condescension* to the "backward" peasant, just as, in the prison camp, he was becoming aware that in spite of their exclusion of him from their midst as an alien nobleman, the peasants had certain virtues of steadfastness, skill, endurance, and a basic sense of justice. For Dostoevsky, it was never faith in God or in Christ that was in question, but rather a faith in the Russian common people as "the human image of Christ." Much later, he wrote in *The Diary of a Writer* a piece called "The Peasant Marey," in which he recalled a childhood experience in which a peasant out of Christian sympathy and responsiveness comforted his panicky, childish fears. It was this image of the peasant Marey that rose between him and his Polish companions with regard to the peasants. He and the peasants shared a common, Orthodox, conception of Christ. The peasant faith was more important, more fundamental, than the peasant brutality. Dostoevsky turned against the notion that the peasants could be helped to rise from barbarism by liberal condescension from above. Dostoevsky therefore abandoned the intelligentsia rebellion, through a regeneration of his faith in the peasant, which was a faith in the peasant's Christianity. He did not, in the process, like the Slavophiles, reject the Petrine reforms, or like them glorify or sentimentalize the Russian past. I have here greatly simplified what in Frank is a long and subtle account.

Curiously, however, Frank sees an analogous shift toward identification of Russian national characteristics with the peasant, his ways and institutions, an upsurge in nationalism and national feeling taking place far from the prison-camp experience, among Dostoevsky's former Westernizer friends, including even the basically cosmopolitan Turgenev. And he sees this as typical of the 1850s. While defeatism in the Crimean War had been rife, even among the Slavophiles, the death of Nicholas I and the advent of a new tsar who

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promised an end to serfdom created a major shift in educated opinion with regard to tsarist authority as well. So one comes to wonder after all as to the specifically ideological significance of Dostoevsky's prison-camp experience.

In addition to a hesitantly developing feeling for the form of Dostoevsky's life, Frank's biography shows many virtues. He does pretty much settle the question of Dostoevsky's epilepsy and its origins. His style, which had a certain almost pedantic awkwardness in the first volume, has become more graceful and supple. The story of Dostoevsky's tragi-comic courtship of his first wife is told with humane feeling, but not without humor. His account of the intellectual history of the Russian 1850s is genuinely interesting and alert. I find it natural that he should have extended his originally projected four volumes to five, and I would not begrudge him six. Nor is it, I think, mistaken to orient Dostoevsky's life to the time and place in which it happened. But Dostoevsky transcended that time and place, both backwards and forwards, and it is for expressive signs of that transcendence that I will look in subsequent volumes.

SIDNEY MONAS

SEX AND CIVILIZATION

HISTOIRE DE LA SEXUALITE: II. L'USAGE DES PLAISIRS. III. LE SOUCI DE SOI. By Michel Foucault. Editions Gallimard. 85Fr.

In the first volume of his *History*, "La Volonté de Savoir" (1976), Michel Foucault declared that our civilization was dominated by sexuality and sought to determine what our obsession with sexuality might mean. Was it another name for power? No, for the ruling classes also had to abide by the same laws as those over whom they ruled. Rather, it seems, sexuality is our new religion: Freud is the spiritual father, and in its role as religion, sexuality has become the topic of moral debate. As a result, the battle between good and evil is no longer fought as it was by the early Christians between God and the Devil, but within ourselves.

In order to understand how our society has come to be so concerned with what previous ages took for granted, Foucault did not try to analyze particular phenomena characteristic of modern times,

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such as "adult entertainment"; he turned instead to the remote past where, presumably, modern attitudes toward that human condition had been formed. Volume Two of the *History*, "The Exploitation of Pleasure," published in 1984, describes what Foucault believed to have been the ancient Greeks' view of sexuality; a companion volume, "Looking After Oneself" discusses the (in his view) more consciously moral attitude of Greeks and Romans in the first centuries of our era, before Christianity began to impose its restrictions on the enjoyment of one of the few enduring human pleasures. The austere and influential attitudes of the Fathers of the Church form the subject of a fourth volume, that he had not yet completed at his death. However, "Confessions of the Flesh" (*Les Aveux de la Chair*) will be published in the form that he left it.

The two volumes about the ancient world, like the introductory volume, are more declamatory than analytic. Foucault makes a statement, summarizes the content of some book or treatise in support or amplification, and then begins again with a new assertion related to the first. Subsections are numbered, so that the reader has at least the impression that he is making logical progress through the vast moral and social issues sexuality seems always to have raised. But although Foucault is prepared to tell us what Plato or Xenophon said about love or the sexual act, he offers no explanation of why they said it, or of the relation of philosophical theory to actual practice. In fact, Foucault offers us not so much a survey of ancient thought as a discursive commentary on the *values* inherent in ancient notions about sex. In Volume Two, which covers sexuality in the Greek world until the Hellenistic period, Foucault claims that while the Greeks attached moral weight to sexual questions, unlike ourselves, they had little interest in actual practice.

For the Greeks, says Foucault, sexuality raised larger issues of power and self-control, assertion and passivity, reciprocity and individuality, heterosexuality and homosexuality. Plato, in the *Symposium*, saw *eros* and *ta aphrodisia* merely as means of becoming able to recognize goodness in the abstract. Aristotle advised controlling one's emotions in order to make the best use of one's reasoning powers, and compared the relation of men and women to that of masters and slaves. Xenophon, in his treatise *On the Household*, showed how marriage can serve as an illustration for the examined life, where the husband instructs his wife about what she is to say and do and how she should arrange each storage room. In medical treatises, also, sexual feelings are described only in general terms, and only so

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that the nature of "normal" intercourse and childbirth may be understood. As Foucault observed in 1983 in an interview about his *History*, the Greeks ". . . were not much interested in sex. It was not a great issue."

True enough, so long as one sticks, like Foucault, to philosophical texts and moral treatises. But if one looks at ancient comedy or legal cases, Athenian society in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. seems almost as preoccupied with sex as we are. Aristophanes's comedies provide a wealth of specific information about sexual positions, frequency of intercourse, and techniques of masturbation for both men and women. We learn from a hilarious scene in the *Lysistrata*, where a wife tantalizes her husband and than runs away at the last moment, something about ordinary bedroom comforts: privacy, water to wash with afterwards, the right perfume, a blanket. Speeches written by Lysias and Demosthenes for private clients describe how men left their wives and lived with other women in different parts of town, how proper women met men at festivals and had sexual relations with them while their husbands were dining with their men friends in another part of the house. Nor can it be argued that the average Greek man was likely to have been guided in his everyday actions by what Plato or Aristotle thought. Most people couldn't read at all, and of the few who could, many seemed to have been content with *The Great Sayings of Euripides* or *Plot Summaries of Famous Dramas*. In the fifth century, most people encountered moral discussion only at the theater, in dramas like Euripides's *Hippolytus*, which considered the consequences of chastity and of sexual passion. After the fourth century, in the comedies of poets like Menander, issues were simplified to the level best known to us in soap operas: Should the boy marry the poor girl he loves, or the rich girl next door? Should he marry the girl he got pregnant? Shouldn't a wife be able to get angry at her husband for having spent the income of her family's property on his mistress and her daughter?

Note also that in comedy and lawsuits, heterosexual relationships predominate, with women often in positions of influence or power over men, even if the law did not legally recognize their rights: illegitimate or stepchildren are sometimes preferred to legitimate issue; a wife persuades her father to let her remain with her bankrupt husband; and a man who believes that he has been betrayed by his wife complains that "she loved me and I loved her," and uses three different words for love to describe the relationship: *philein* (to love friends and family), *agapan* (to cherish), *eran* (to feel

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sexual passion for). The philosophical texts, as Foucault rightly observes, concentrate on the men. He observes that in the sexual act, according to the medical treatises, "it is in every case the masculine act that determines, rules, excites, dominates. It is the man who determines the beginning and the end of pleasure, and who also assures that the female organs remain healthy by keeping them in use." But did the ordinary men and women who could not afford doctors understand sex in quite these terms?

Foucault may be justified in ignoring what ordinary people did because he believed that modern attitudes derive primarily from the works of the philosophers. But he should have looked more closely at ordinary life, if only to explain why the philosophers and theorists give such disproportionate emphasis to the importance of homosexual relationships. Presumably these relationships were considered intellectually and socially more satisfying than heterosexual relationships because most women—especially in Athens—were poorly educated and spent most of their time involved with child-bearing, child-raising, and weaving, tasks with which the few men who had the leisure to think about their actions were not concerned. Plato, in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, and Isocrates, in his *Eroticus*, describe the possible ethical advantages of love affairs between older and younger men. Their discussions concentrate so hard on the educational and political advantages of such relationships that we would never know how an older man managed to attract the allegiance of a particularly delectable thirteen-year-old boy, were it not for the illustrations on the vases that upper-class Athenians and Greeks in the Western colonies bought in large quantities to decorate their dining rooms.

The materials surveyed in Volume Three, "Caring for Oneself," are more diverse, but Foucault chooses to emphasize only those developments that later were incorporated into Christianity: reciprocal chastity in marriage and the virtues of continence. These ideas are to varying degrees latent in early pagan idealism, but they only begin to be practiced by philosophers and their followers in the Hellenistic Age and after. The book gets off to an interesting start with a discussion of a second-century A.D. Greek manual, Artemidorus's *The Interpretation of Dreams*—a work from which Peter Brown has derived much interesting information about the hopes and fears of ordinary men. In Artemidorus, sexual dreams in particular display a new emphasis on continence: ejaculation, for example, signifies a vain expenditure; face-to-face intercourse with the man

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on top signifies control of the female; other positions denote excess and warn of problems with friends or finances. The idea that semen should be conserved, which is implicit in Artemidorus, becomes explicit in later philosophical theory, and ultimately in the notion that husband as well as wife should practice intercourse only with one's legal partner, and only for the purpose of bearing children. The second-century A.D. physician, Galen, advised a patient to masturbate in order to purify himself of desires; although earlier in the fourth century B.C., Diogenes, masturbating in his tub in the Athenian agora, observed only that he wished the body could be so easily relieved of hunger pains.

Unlike historians such as Peter Brown or Ramsay MacMullen, Foucault does not see in late pagan religion or philosophy an attempt by individuals to gain some control for themselves over a world increasingly dominated by forces beyond their capacity or understanding. He seems interested in describing what happened, rather than why. In the process, inevitably, he fails to explain why these philosophical notions survived longer than their predecessors—which they did chiefly because the Christian fathers, unlike pagan priests and thinkers, had the power to enforce on their followers what for the pagans had been a matter of choice.

Foucault argues that both pagans and Christians were tending towards equality within marriage for men and women, and saw marriage as an ideal combination of pleasure and utility. But Foucault does not confront the question, how far these ideals (not to mention practice) were from any modern notion of partnership. He cites Plutarch's treatise "Advice on Marriage" as a prime example of the new equality, but overlooks in his survey the fact that for all his abstract principles, Plutarch advises the wife to do most of the adjusting: she must worship her husband's gods, become educated so that he can talk with her; he advised her to say, "Dear husband, to me you are a guide, philosopher and teacher in all that is beautiful and divine." Late antique romances end with the marriage of the hero and heroine after exciting and perilous separation and adventures, but no reader (or writer) would have assumed that such equality of activity would have continued after the marriage was consummated.

Occasional remarks in Volumes Two and Three suggest that in Volume Four, "Confessions of the Flesh," Foucault hoped to describe more clearly where the Christian notion of marriage began to diverge from the deep mutual respect advocated by pagan

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philosophers such as the Stoic Musonius Rufus. From the very first, Christian teachers began to introduce the notion that celibacy was preferable to marriage in any form. This priority was distinctive. Certain pagan priesthoods required at least temporary chastity, because of its practical advantages, especially for women; but no pagan philosopher would have claimed, along with St. Jerome, that virginity was a superior state of being. Foucault suggests that in time, self-control was replaced by self-denunciation, and that self-denial and purification were matched in Christian morality by increasing codification of sexual practice and by a "hermeneutic" of desire. To some extent, the idea that sexuality is polluting is inherent in Jewish law; but none of the rabbis who considered it a crime for a man to come near a menstruating woman seem to have hated all physical manifestations of sex with the same zealotry as St. Paul. And it was a Christian celibate, St. Jerome, who sought to encourage his rich female adherents to adopt virginity by telling them to imagine that spiritual union with the divine would offer a meaningful substitute for the carnal intercourse of which they were to be deprived.

Foucault seems to have been interested in what Greek and Roman writers said about sex because of their influence on our ways of thinking. It is true that sexuality has a moral significance, and that law has come increasingly to accept the notion that the rules should be the same for husband and wife. But the basic and abiding influence on modern notions of sexuality stems from Christianity, and what traces of Jewish prudery it preserves. Our confusion about licit and illicit sex begins not with Diogenes in his tub but with God striking down Onan; and our odd notions about what to expect from intercourse do not stem from Plutarch's sensible advice about consideration in bed, but from Jerome's bizarre vision of the virgin waiting for Christ the bridegroom, to bring her transports of pleasure without a physical touch.

As they now stand, the existing three volumes of Foucault's *History* leave unproved his basic thesis that the concentration on sexuality in the post-Victorian era is in some way new. Volumes Two and Three raise many interesting questions about the origins of our attitudes, but offer no fresh understanding; instead they seem only to offer a survey of classical materials discussed more succinctly and accurately elsewhere. Foucault clearly read all the texts he discusses, but he seems not to have questioned certain persistent myths about ancient society, in particular the idea that Greek men were not

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physically attracted to Greek women, or that the ancients wrote about their dreams and themselves in the frank, confessional way that autobiographies might be written now. However much we may feel ourselves drawn to ancient writing, and see ourselves in them, any treatment of the ancient world that intends to be informative must acknowledge that the ancient writers were not only not naive but often disingenuous, and because Foucault could not see what is written between and behind the lines of ancient theory, Volumes Two and Three tell us relatively little about the nature of sexuality in the ancient world.

Nor is it clear that the history of sexuality in the remote past, even if it were more comprehensively studied, could provide that "genealogy" of ourselves that Foucault sought to recover. Like Lacan, who thought that phenomena as complex as human emotions could be described in terms of null sets or Borromean knots, Foucault seems to have come to believe in the reality of his metaphors. But earlier attitudes cannot be reconstructed simply through current ones; opinions are shaped by many "outside" developments. Foucault might have been justified in designating us "Other Victorians," if, in our time, moral restraints had not been made superfluous by the widespread use of mechanical contraceptives and the Pill.

MARY LEFKOWITZ

MORE ON BLOOMSBURY

VANESSA BELL. By Frances Spalding. Ticknor & Fields. $22.95.
JULIA: A PORTRAIT OF JULIA STRACHEY. By Herself and Frances Partridge. Little, Brown, and Co. $16.95.

Whatever the actual desires of the reading public may be, publishers seem convinced that the appetite for Bloomsburiana is bottomless. The letters and diaries of Virginia Woolf alone give us as much information on Bloomsbury as we could possibly wish to have, but the books keep coming, telling familiar anecdotes from slightly new angles, filling in gaps we didn't know were there. As the archive swells, so does Bloomsbury, expanding to include figures whose membership in the group was equivocal or even nonexistent.

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To the unlucky outside world, "Bloomsbury" very early came to mean not a neighborhood or a particular set of people but an attitude, and so it remains today. You might not be fortunate enough to have been born a Stephen or a Strachey, but if you study those names well, you can pick up some of their style.

Bloomsbury books, that is, tend to read like manuals of behavior, Miss Manners in biographical form. They tell us little of world-historical import; with a couple of exceptions, their subjects possessed middling talent and made small marks on their professions. Nothing they did is half so interesting as the way they did it. The most obnoxious instance of this tone remains Nigel Nicolson's *Portrait of a Marriage* (1974), in which Nicolson asks us to believe that significant moral lessons are to be gleaned from such matters as his father's anxiety, during the Versailles Peace Conference, for Vita's well-being among the bistros of Paris, got up as André the chauffeur. Ten years ago, when the sexual revolution was apparently in full swing, it seemed at least plausible that time had justified those antics; now we may well wonder whether World War II might not have been forestalled, if only Harold had kept his mind on business.

To some degree, Frances Spalding's *Vanessa Bell* continues the Nicolson tradition; we are repeatedly invited to admire what in 1934 Roger Fry called "the beauty of [her] way of life." That way included a lifelong love affair and eventual cohabitation with Duncan Grant, whose enthusiastic homosexuality failed to prevent his fathering her child, Angelica. Angelica Bell had to wait until she was nineteen to learn the truth about her parentage: she was not, despite her name, the daughter of Clive Bell, her mother's husband. The revelation, according to Spalding, did nothing to relieve Angelica's "growing sense of repressed anguish"; as she told a television interviewer forty years later, "I was constantly striving to be thought of as somebody perfectly ordinary and I never could get through to that kind of reality." Roger would have been surprised to hear this: he had had an affair with Vanessa, too, though without issue, and everybody stayed on an even keel afterwards. "It really is an almost ideal family," he wrote Helen Anrep in 1926, "based as it is on adultery and mutual forbearance with Clive the deceived husband and me the abandoned lover. It really is rather a triumph of reasonableness over the conventions."

Herself the product of a later generation, Spalding shows occasional flashes of skepticism toward the reasonable triumph of these *soi-disant* free spirits. In her preface, she mumbles darkly that "the

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weight of institutionalized privilege in England still makes it difficult to assess Bloomsbury with adequate detachment," and here and there in *Vanessa Bell* she fumes about "the protected position from which, because of her [Vanessa's] sex and class, she viewed the world." Spalding seems at any moment about to launch into a cold assessment of Vanessa's (and Bloomsbury's) liberated attitude—to suggest that the Bloomsberries depended as much on class demarcations as any mid-Victorian forebear could have done, that Bloomsbury freedom had its callous side and was not very different from the license aristocrats have always enjoyed, that Bloomsbury's notion of "the Victorian" (which we, to our detriment, have inherited) was only Oedipal after all. Yet the breakthrough never comes. She wavers, but on the whole Spalding seems convinced that Vanessa's story is worth telling because it can teach *us* how to live.

In a way it's odd that Vanessa's biography has been written only now. It was to a stain on Vanessa's dress that Lytton Strachey pointed and queried "Semen?", setting Bloomsbury on its career of liberated talk. She was a founder of the group and central to it from its beginning, but she was not literary and left few words. Her art was visual—mostly oil paintings, with a few wall decorations, woodcuts, and cover designs for her sister Virginia's books. If devotion to one's art were the sole criterion of excellence in it, Vanessa's work would rank high; despite the distractions of childbirth, two world wars, and innumerable emotional entanglements, her dedication to painting never faltered. Spalding leaves us rather in the dark, however, on her contemporary and subsequent reputation in the art world. She was judged inferior to Duncan and sometimes sniped at for Bloomsbury airs; lowlife like Wyndham Lewis dismissed her rudely as "a bohemian with a private income." The eight color plates and thirty-odd black-and-white illustrations that adorn *Vanessa Bell* only complicate the question of her stature, at least for this untrained observer. They show her dabbling in a wide range of styles, subjects, and techniques, always with competence and usually with charm, but they reveal nothing distinctive or striking. And Spalding's neo-Paterian forays into art criticism—the composition of *Iceland Poppies* (1909) "is sustained like a strain of music that lingers on dissonance before resolution"—are of less than no help.

That Vanessa's rank as an artist should remain equivocal in spite of *Vanessa Bell* is in part, no doubt, a reflection of her equivocal talent; it also says something about the generally lackluster quality of twentieth-century British painting. But Spalding is also at fault.

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She has too little perspective on her subject, too little awareness of the social and professional contexts in which, despite her retiring habits, Vanessa moved. Paragraph after paragraph of *Vanessa Bell* looks like cut-and-pasted snippets of letters translated into indirect discourse: where they all went, what the weather was like, how a bottle of Perrier exploded in the luggage rack, startling everybody. The minutiae of anyone's life can be interesting, in a mindless sort of way; but when that life is proclaimed significant, even a model, one expects details to be placed according to their value, not just rattled off as if all were equal. It is by no means self-evident that we should take heed of Vanessa Bell, and Spalding is unpersuasive.

Julia Strachey's case is very different. Her literary output, two short novels and a number of sketches for *The New Yorker* and other magazines, was too slight to ground any particular reputation. Her connection with Bloomsbury was marginal; she was born too late (1901) for direct participation in the doings of her uncle Lytton and his glamorous friends. Julia made a mark only on the lives of those who knew her well, and to preserve her memory is more an act of love than of preachment. It is in this spirit that Frances Partridge has assembled *Julia*. She quotes an entry in Julia's last notebook, characteristically entitled *Lamentations*: "My fear is that I shall lose the only interest I still have in staying alive—namely the desire to get some of my past life materialised in my writing." "To further this aim of Julia's," Partridge adds, "and at the same time show her quality as a writer and a human being, has been the purpose of this book." Its success is admirable.

Julia is not a conventional biography, but a patchwork of letters, selections from diaries and journals, and pieces of Julia's short fiction, all stitched together with bracketed passages of narrative. The format is loose, though much less disjointed than it might have been; Partridge, as she demonstrated in *A Pacifist's War* (1978) and *Love in Bloomsbury* (1981), is an accomplished writer herself, and her touch as an editor is deft and graceful. Perhaps also, burdened by no illusions as to the impact or imitability of Julia's career, she has felt free to leave the "portrait" unretouched, allowing us to draw our own conclusions both from the story she tells and from the enduring love that led her to tell it.

Born in India to Oliver Strachey and the former Ruby Mayer, Julia spent her first six years in the bizarre, vivid world of the British Raj; then, without transition, on the breakup of her parents' marriage, she was shipped to the opposite extreme—Aunt Elinor's Kens-

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ington mansion and the care of the implacable "Old Scotch Nanny." The incongruity of these two scenes—snake charmers up against Presbyterianism—set the tone for Julia's later life, endowing her with the lively sense of absurdity visible in all her writing and making her a permanent misfit.

At ten she was shifted again, into a third incommensurable realm, the gilt-edged bohemianism of Logan Pearsall Smith and his sister Alys ("Aunty Loo"), recently deserted by her husband, Bertrand Russell. Julia's recollections of this eccentric household make up the most entertaining early chapters of *Julia*; they are told lovingly, but they end with a terrible jolt ("The Earthquake," as Julia calls it). One morning, a reel of dental floss in hand, Aunty Loo blithely informs her young charge: "I always feel so bad—so awfully sorry—that I can never be really fond of thee." Aunty Loo then tools off on her bicycle, leaving Julia to wander the silent house and come to a portentous realization: "I think that I have always been aware of man's predicament—smelt his Cosmic Disaster, in the presence of the numb furniture standing silently in an empty room. Walls, mantelpiece, rigidly unmoving Curtains, wardrobes—uncannily immense, weightily powerful, menacingly reserved. It is out of such as these that I have often heard a kind of awful reverberating underworld music emanating, sending out to me some poisonous news about the nature of Reality."

Poetry or claptrap, smacking equally of either, this sense of the world's lurking hostility haunted Julia throughout her life. She remained inveterately critical of people and their makeshift personal arrangements (a Strachey trait, as Partridge points out), able to satirize them subtly in conversation and writing, but at the same time quite incapable of setting her own affairs on a rational basis. The facts of Julia's history make a melancholy list—two troubled marriages (to Stephen Tomlin and Lawrence Gowing, both artists), shy ventures into a literary career that showed consistent promise but never got fully launched, a declining last decade over which, as Partridge says, it is "painful to linger"—but in the telling, though the sadness is clear, it never turns maudlin. Partridge does not break up her lines to weep; she gives us Julia as she knew her, warts intact, letting *Julia* itself stand as testimony that this story is worth our attention.

Probably, if neither Julia Strachey nor Frances Partridge had any connection to Bloomsbury, *Julia* would never have found a publisher. As it is, the book tells us little about that fabled group and

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offers no lessons to live by. But a single *Julia* is worth ten *Vanessa Bells*, and not only because the one is a collaboration by two talented writers while the other is journeyman's work. Partridge has no illusions, but she writes out of love; Spalding feels no love and has no grip on her illusions. The difference is instructive. Perhaps we ought to be grateful for the continuing vogue of Bloomsbury, if only because it has given us the chance to gauge the relative value of a life that demanded telling and a life that got told in spite of itself.

WALTER KENDRICK

ANTIWEAPONS

How to Make Nuclear Weapons Obsolete. By Robert Jastrow. Little, Brown and Co. $15.45.

As a result of having written several successful books on astronomy for the general reader, Robert Jastrow enjoys a well-deserved reputation for making complex scientific subjects intelligible to the layman. In his latest book, *How to Make Nuclear Weapons Obsolete*, Professor Jastrow turns his attention to a subject of current interest: space-based defense against ballistic missiles. Again demonstrating his skill at exposition, Jastrow has produced a simple and comprehensible account for the layman of the so-called Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). As is evident from the very beginning of the book, Jastrow's interest in this subject derives from the fact that he looks favorably on the idea of a defense against ballistic missiles. Given Jastrow's background it must be good news to the SDI proponents that they can count him on their side.

Robert Jastrow is the founder of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York City and served as the first chairman of NASA's Lunar Exploration Committee. In his scientific work, he has made notable technical contributions in many areas, including nuclear physics and the theory of earth satellites. Currently, he is Professor of Earth Sciences at Dartmouth. Thus Jastrow is well qualified to discuss space-based ballistic missile defense. In addition, he has apparently made a systematic effort to familiarize himself with congressional testimony and other sources of information in the

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open literature concerning both antisatellite weapons and ballistic missile defense. Unlike many of his colleagues in academia, Jastrow does not reject out of hand President Reagan's call for a defense against ballistic missiles. Instead, he has attempted to ascertain the technological facts that lead the Reagan administration to believe that a defense against ballistic missiles is possible. In addition, he briefly discusses the strategic arguments that would lead one to believe that a defense against ballistic missiles is desirable.

While Jastrow performs a valuable public service by explaining the SDI in terms a layman can understand, it does seem to me that in discussing "how it works," he has given the incorrect impression that all the technical problems of ballistic missile defense are solved. For example, Jastrow's (and the administration's) SDI scenario relies to a great extent on beam weapons or electromagnetic rail guns mounted on low altitude satellites. To my knowledge, the question of how these satellites are to be defended against antisatellite weapons is still open. Until this question is resolved it cannot be assumed that the defense against ballistic missiles advocated by Jastrow is technically feasible. Actually, what President Reagan asked for is a research program, and it is premature to imply that the technical problems of ballistic missile defense are solved.

On the other hand, neither can it be claimed that the technical problems of ballistic missile defense are insurmountable, as many of the critics of SDI have done. As Jastrow points out, the Union of Concerned Scientists' original estimate of the number of low altitude satellites needed for a strategic defense was too high by an order of magnitude—an enormous error. I have also looked at the technical arguments of the Union of Concerned Scientists and agree that many of them are invalid. Evidently, this is a case of people desperately trying to find technical arguments to support their political ideals.

Jastrow's discussion of the political justification for ballistic missile defense seems to me quite plausible. This book is a pleasant contrast to the writings of such arms control "experts" as George Kennan, Robert McNamara, and the Union of Concerned Scientists. The arguments presented by these authors in opposition to the strategic defense initiative are, in general, tortured and rather implausible. It is fortunate that a scientist of Jastrow's caliber is willing to provide simple counterarguments to these ideological opponents of a defense system.

My main disappointment in the present book is that it is not

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more eloquent. After Jastrow's brilliant and imaginative description of the evolution of intelligence, *The Enchanted Loom*, my expectations were very high. The chapters on satellites and missiles do approach Jastrow's typical eloquence. In addition, there are a number of original ideas in the book—for example, his explanation of why our NATO allies should not fear SDI. However, for the most part Jastrow seems to be simply reporting things he has heard from others. This gives the book a journalistic quality. Given Jastrow's past literary accomplishments, I would have expected something more uniformly original.

Despite its literary shortcomings, though, *How to Make Nuclear Weapons Obsolete* is a welcome relief from the antistrategic defense litany of the liberal intellectual establishment, and we do hope Jastrow continues to take on the political adversaries of the defense system who pose as scientific critics.

GEORGE F. CHAPLINE

LETTERS OF LIFE

THE LETTERS OF HENRY JAMES: VOLUME IV, 1895–1916. Edited by Leon Edel. Harvard University Press. $30.00.

"The letters of life, in general," Henry James wrote Mrs. Humphrey Ward in 1906, "become more and more its *poison* . . . and are a matter against which, for myself, my heart is rapidly casing itself in impenetrable steel." Just how penetrable his determination actually was should be apparent from the width of the final volume of Leon Edel's selections among the thousands of James's surviving letters, ending more than a decade of editorial dedication and covering the lengthiest stretch of the novelist's adult life. Having shrewdly concluded the third volume with the debacle of *Guy Domville* in 1895, the lowest moment in James's erratic career, Edel is able to devote this volume, most conveniently, to the entire major phase, the long literary reconnoitering in which James turned from the lures of money and the public and refined his writing in privacy, achieving in the process his most rigorously conceived and executed works. It is not surprising, then, that James spends much time in these letters catching up, apologizing for long silences and lapses; clearly, his

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mind and energies, as James ages and time dwindles, are directed elsewhere.

Yet the volume, coinciding as it does with the occurrence of his greatest work, extends its rewards nonetheless to James's enlarging phalanx of scholars and critics. And while Edel, on the whole, might have clarified the relation of the Harvard series to the preceding Percy Lubbock selection of 1920—why were certain letters carried over and others, often no less interesting, left behind?—its completion will settle the novelist's epistolary profile for at least the next generation. James's is one of the most spacious of literary correspondences; whereas the bulk of the earlier letters aroused perhaps more curiosity than they satisfied, the contents of this volume are surely more informative about James's unique artistic gifts and personality.

By 1898, still wounded and discouraged, James had purchased Lamb House and retreated from London in search of tranquility and a less distracting atmosphere. In the aftermath of his theatrical failure, James put its lessons to good use; references occur throughout these letters to the "scenic" and "dramatic" values familiar to James's readers, representing the transfer to fiction of the principles he had absorbed earlier in the decade. His experience in the theatre had taught him, moreover, the perils of compromise, for a catastrophe that would have silenced a less resilient artist elicited from James a new tenacity apparent from many affirmations in these letters and from the intractable difficulty of his later work. As he hibernated in Rye, adopting more reclusive and peculiar work habits, James complicated his demands of himself and of his art and quietly changed the destiny of the novel. Nor did James, from this later perspective, leave uninspected the work that had preceded his deepened purpose; among other episodes, this volume covers the great project of the New York Edition, the spring cleaning that James gave a certain number of his works between the years 1907 and 1909, revising his earlier fiction in the style of the major phase. An undertaking surely without precedent in literary history, the New York Edition involves nothing less than the desire to control, for posterity, the official shape and complexion of one's own output. And if James, throughout his life, is only occasionally explicit in letters about his aesthetic, it is because he says all he could possibly say in the prefaces that accompany the New York Edition and compose a personal manifesto, an eloquent and searching vindication of the novelist's art. It is a defense that James had occasion to repeat over the years; in many of these letters (to Ward, to Wharton, to Shaw), and in the dignity of his response

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to Wells's famous attack, James reiterates the principles and convictions expressed at such length in the prefaces.

For a life lived chiefly in art, there is drama in the years of this collection, beyond the drama of imaginative endeavor. As a result partly of the neglect that afflicted the New York Edition, partly of stagnating creativity, James suffered in 1910 a vague nervous collapse—"black depression," he wrote Edmund Gosse, "the blackness of darkness and the cruellest melancholia"—the severity of which might seem a novelty to many of his readers. The "imagination of disaster" that James had once startled a friend by famously claiming for himself resurfaces at intervals in this volume. In 1897, James tells Whistler, in a remarkable statement, "You have done too much of the exquisite not to have earned more despair than anything else"; here and there, in these letters, James's reticence loosens to reveal the disturbances at stake in his work and the costs of a life surrendered to its transposition in prose. In a message of condolence, James broods candidly, "I've gone through Death, and Death, enough in my long life, to know how all that we *are*, all that we *have*, all that is best of us within . . . become then but aides and channels and open gates to suffering." Such momentary disclosures remind us how desperately James turned to writing for solace, a reliance he has in mind when he advises Morton Fullerton to "throw yourself on the blest *alternative* life—which . . . is what I mean by the life of art, and which religiously invoked and handsomely understood . . . *never* fails the sincere invoker—sees him through everything, on the contrary and reveals to him the secrets of and for her doing so. She has seen *me* through everything, and that was a large order too."

A large order, no doubt, for an imagination that valued in experience its adaptability to art and the readiness with which it lent itself to rendering. Yet to approach life as potential fiction is to omit its spontaneities, and James seems to echo Strether's great outburst when he tells Edith Wharton, in response to her extramarital involvements and problems, to "sit tight yourself *and go through the movements of life.* That keeps up our connection with life—I mean of the immediate and apparent life. . . . Live it all through, every inch of it—out of it something valuable will come." Behind James's hesitations and withdrawals lay always an attraction to the importance Pater had placed on the intensities of the moment. It is against this background of susceptibilities that James's depression in 1910—the New York Edition ignored, his energies temporarily depleted by unappreciated revisions—must be understood.

As he gradually recuperated, James absorbed another blow

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with the death of his brother William, "my ideal Elder Brother," as he wrote their boyhood friend T. S. Perry—"my protector, my backer, my authority, and my pride." The fruition of James's relationship with his brother, both competitive and complementary, is one of the chief fascinations of this volume, for the novelist seems to have felt closer in temperament to William as he developed, with the major phase, a new confidence in his art. Despite William's famous impatience with the later style, James seems to have struck a truce with the superiority he had always attributed to his sibling, and his letters to William and his family, consistently the longest by far, reflect a great partnership of spirit and respect. And it was the plan to organize a commemorative volume that evolved into the last considerable accomplishment of James's career, the remarkable autobiography of which he published two books and left a third unfinished at his death.

The completion of *The Golden Bowl* in 1904 ended the most sedentary decade of James's career, a time of quiet labor and of rustication in Sussex interrupted by winters in London. Yet the period of this volume includes the great adventure of James's later years, his return to America in 1904-05 after twenty years abroad. It had always been one of James's great themes to reverse the direction of American exploration, at the moment his countrymen domesticated the West, by sending his fictional Americans East, across the Atlantic, to rediscover an Old World as new and unfamiliar as the New World had been to their ancestors. Absence now turned James's imagination westward again, to satisfy an increasing desire to see the country that had enlarged unrecognizably since his parents' death and to renew an uneasy romance with his native land. Two decades of residence in England had somehow made him a writer more profoundly American than ever, and James in many letters before his visit seems to reconsider his expatriation, imploring William in 1899 to let his children "contract local saturations and attachments in respect to their *own* great and glorious country" and writing Edith Wharton "in favor of the American Subject. . . . Profit, be warned, by my awful example of exile and ignorance."

Yet America itself, as described in these letters, greeted James as a place of shocks and unexpected ruptures. Aside from the beauties of New England autumns and the renewal of old friendships, James seems to have been confronted by more than he had bargained for, more than his imaginative faculties could usefully assimilate—"the movement and obsession and complication," he wrote from Chicago, "of all this overwhelming *Muchness* of space and distance

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and time." If nothing else, James's visit yielded the material for the brooding and rueful essays that make *The American Scene* unique among travelogues, and revived in James the ambivalence that had motivated his settlement abroad in the first place. Limited space, it appears, prevented Scribners from reprinting *The Bostonians* and James from restoring, as he had hoped to, his most maligned and misunderstood work; yet it seems otherwise significant that he admitted to the New York Edition none of his "American" novels and tales.

By 1915, disappointed with American neutrality in the Great War, James settled old scores with his homeland and, in a reviled and uncomprehended gesture, switched citizenships in solidarity with England. The carnage of the Great War provides the final drama in this volume, provoking some of his most impassioned and despairing letters. His naturalization as a British subject only made formal a commitment that exhibited itself in his many civilian services—comforting Belgian refugees in London, assisting wounded soldiers, writing articles in support of the war effort. One might compare the valor of his participation here, in old age, with Joyce's petulance, say, in resenting the war as a distraction and interference, or with Auden's flight from England at the brink of the Second World War. The sacrifice of life and civilized values, however, finally broke this man; as one of the curiosities of this volume, Edel reproduces the Napoleonic delusions and wanderings of James's final fragmentary dictations, around the time that England completed his separation from America by conferring on him the Order of Merit. "Dearest Alice," he had written William's widow in 1913, "I could come back to America . . . to *die*—but never, never to live." Even in death, however, James remained estranged from his native land; arriving in New York, his sister-in-law had to smuggle his ashes past customs for burial in Cambridge.

FREDERICK WEGENER

DEMYTHOLOGIZING WHITMAN

WALT WHITMAN: THE MAKING OF THE POET. By Paul Zweig. Basic Books. $18.95.

When Pauline Kael in a recent issue of *The New Yorker* called "A Passage to India" one of Whitman's best poems, it was clear

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not only that she hadn't read the poem in years (it's terrible), but also that she felt confident passing along a canonical view few readers know enough to dispute. Over thirty years ago, Randall Jarrell said Whitman was almost the only great poet serious readers felt comfortable confessing they'd never read; today, it's much the same. There are several reasons for such ignorance and neglect. Whitman has suffered from the lack of a decent text, from a New Criticism bias in favor of a kind of poetry he was constitutionally incapable of writing, and from a deep-seated American homophobia which has made it impossible to read him intelligently. And Whitman himself is a villain in the piece—or rather, that smug, pompous Whitman we all know as the Good Grey Poet. Shortly before his death, Whitman officially endorsed the last and weakest of the nine editions of *Leaves of Grass* (the so-called Death-Bed Edition), and it is that edition which has been most widely disseminated ever since—with disastrous consequences for the large audience Whitman so ardently hoped for. Never a good critic of his own work, the older Whitman expurgated and bowdlerized his poetry during the last twenty years of his life, producing a tame, sanitized text that has little in common with the first few editions of *Leaves of Grass*. To roam unaccompanied through the Death-Bed Edition is to guarantee disappointment for oneself, for the book is the production of a vain, boastful man, a braggart who fancies himself a prophet. The most important recent effort in Whitman scholarship has been to remove the impositions and disguises of the older Whitman, so that we can rediscover the radically original writing of the younger man.

Paul Zweig's study of Whitman takes us far in the direction of this general rehabilitation of the younger Whitman. Zweig in fact focuses throughout on the younger Whitman, giving us a twenty-year span in his life, from the time in the late 1940s when he first began to collect words and phrases in a journal, through the first three editions of *Leaves of Grass* and then the Civil War years, to a concluding glimpse of the Good Grey Poet, "the Whitman we have all come to know with his grizzled beard and his frozen optimism." Zweig's main question is: how did the lackluster Walter Whitman, Jr. become transformed into "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs" and one of the world's great lyric poets? The puzzle is that of all genius, but Zweig is right to claim we have an extreme form of it in Whitman's case. Out of such inauspicious beginnings, who could have foreseen the amazing birth that took place with the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855?

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In answering the question he sets himself, Zweig tells the story of a man with an omnivorous mind, dazzled by the dream of remaking and perfecting himself which he found in phrenology (he believed its motto literally: "Self-made or never made"), a man who was open to the entire motley range of mid-nineteenth century American culture and who had an uncanny ability to recognize what he could take and transform for the uses of his poetry. One of the most striking images in the book is that of Whitman seated in the library of Maurice Bucke's mental hospital in Toronto "with a dozen books open before him, not so much reading as savoring ideas, turns of style." Whitman stole a great deal of what he savored, and he ranged widely: the new geology and George Sand, Carlyle and Ossian and the Bible, contemporary hacks like Samuel Warren and Martin Tupper Farquhar, the new archeology and the new astronomy, Emerson and Epictetus, the same phrenological tracts Hegel had read, tales of sea fights and of the Old West, literary theory, Quaker inspirational literature, Longfellow and Tennyson and Michelet and Ruskin—the list goes on and on. Zweig calls Whitman a magpie and a sponge who (in Whitman's own words) "absorbed" whatever of use came to hand and "translated" it into his poetry. Unlike the image Whitman projects in his work of a man to whom poetry came spontaneously and easily, Zweig discovers Whitman in this formative period working long and hard at "braiding" these ideas and influences into a prose-like poetry which, influenced by the prosodic experiments of Ruskin and Carlyle, Whitman constantly reworked, guided by an incomparable mastery of rhythmic form. What finally emerges in Zweig's expert telling is a story that's an "astonishing combination of poetry genius, street theater, and fraud"—in short, a typical American success story. One of the unexpected pleasures of Zweig's book is that, without ever claiming to, he shows why Whitman is the most characteristically American of our poets, and in doing so he makes clearer the line of influence from Whitman through Pound and Williams to poets of the present.

Though always exciting, Zweig's book is sometimes hard to read. One-third through, Zweig sees "no secure order which can be translated into a story" from the 1830s on. For the last two-thirds of the book, then, Zweig gives us "themes and trains of thought." What follows is highly personal, sometimes idiosyncratic, often brilliant—a subjective "braiding" of biography, cultural history, sociology, and literary criticism. Zweig's method is one of theme and variation, repetition and accumulation, a method which may have been con-

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genial to him as a poet but which is sometimes frustrating for the reader. For example, the method allows claims which don't get explained, so Zweig mentions Whitman's "genius for carnal language" and says somewhere that Whitman's greatest gift as a poet is "his mastery of rhythmic form," but we never learn what he means. The method also tends to a metaphoric richness which oddly obscures in the effort to illuminate: within a few pages, "Song of Myself" is called "an engine of self-making," "a flirtatious commentary on itself as a poem," "a reckless present tense," "a voice becoming naked," "the flesh that is grass," "an extravagant monologue," "an opera in which all the voices are one," "a voice that cannot stop 'singing,' delighted with its own fulness, plunging into its unuttered future," and so on. At times like this, Whitman's poetry gets lost in Zweig's invention.

Yet these quotations also point to one of the strengths of the book—its passion and its sympathetic feel for Whitman and his work. Of all the biographies we have, Zweig's conveys the fullest and most vivid sense of Whitman himself—an immense accomplishment since Whitman is such an elusive subject, a man with many vested interests in the hidden and the obscure. Zweig's readings are superb, and he excels previous writers in this treatment of important subjects such as Whitman's troubled relations with his family, especially his father; his tremulous homosexuality and its ambiguous role in his life and his poetry; the crucial influence of theater and opera in the writing; Whitman's inspired manipulation of the mass media of his day; his amazing and sometimes maddening double nature and, related to this, his extravagant self-consciousness and role-playing (he was for Yeats the type of "Artificial Individuality"). Perhaps the most moving part of the book is Zweig's description of Whitman's Civil War years, for though this period has little to do with Whitman's life as a poet, it exemplifies the major themes of love and death which run thoughout his work. Zweig understands the erotic element in Whitman's ministrations to the wounded and dying, and he sees these years, as did Whitman himself, as the closing out of the life of the creative Whitman. The Lincoln elegy will follow, and a handful of unjustly neglected lyrics which predate Pound's imagism by thirty years and more, but for the most part Whitman's life as a poet is done.

Whitman's life during the Civil War is perhaps so moving in Zweig's account because Zweig himself was close to death as he finished this book. Nearing fifty years old, he died in Paris last year, a sucessful poet and critic who for several years was chairman of the

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Comparative Literature department at Queens College. In his brief life, Zweig did so many and such varied things that even a partial list of them reads like one of Whitman's catalogues. Repeatedly he was drawn to adventure—a central theme of his life and his writing. This book is among his last and best adventures, for few books could have been so challenging to write, and few could have been so well-written. It is a gifted book, and an important book, and a very generous book. I've often thought that, in one of the several resemblances which unite Zweig and Whitman, "This is no book, / Who touches this, touches a man."

ALAN HELMS

THE PUZZLE OF C. WRIGHT MILLS

C. WRIGHT MILLS: AN AMERICAN UTOPIAN. By Irving Louis Horowitz. The Free Press. $24.95.

C. Wright Mills was a lightning rod for some of the most powerful currents which surged through American social science and political ideology in the 1950s and 1960s. Irving Louis Horowitz—Professor of Sociology and Political Science at Rutgers University and the editor of *Society*, a journal devoted to bridging the gap between social scientists and a wider, educated public—has spent two decades gathering the factual evidence and analytic perspectives from which Mills's life might be evaluated.

Horowitz has chosen to divide his book into three sections. The first, "Settings," sketches the various intellectual contexts in which Mills moved, from his undergraduate education in Texas, on through his graduate training at the University of Wisconsin, a stint at the University of Maryland during World War II, and finally the seventeen years spent in and around Columbia University until his death in 1962. While at Columbia, such luminaries as Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton, Daniel Bell, Jacques Barzun, Lionel Trilling, and Richard Hofstadter became his friends. At the service held in his memory, the common refrain of his assembled colleagues was "I used to be his friend, but we became somewhat estranged." Mills's progressive estrangement from his colleagues grew out of conflicting conceptions of intellectual responsibility, and it is as a chronicle of

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that conflict that *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian* is most compelling.

The middle section, "Sources," illuminates the intellectual influences on Mills's work, including Marxism, American pragmatism, Max Weber, and Karl Mannheim. Horowitz demonstrates that Mills had little interest in definitional consistency or conceptual clarity. His "pragmatism" lay in eclectically borrowing concepts from past sociological theorists in his ongoing battle against a society he assumed to be morally illegitimate. This prevented a clear conceptualization of the possible relationship between subjective predilections and the scientific pursuit of enlightenment, the problem which led to the breach between Mills and his academic colleagues.

The last third of the book, "Substances," deals with Mills's major books, *The New Men of Power*, *White Collar*, *The Power Elite*, *The Causes of World War Three*, and *Listen, Yankee*, as well as his projected "six to nine volume comparative study of the world range of present day social structures," his "epochal sociology." Horowitz's summary and analysis of each work are combined with excerpts from contemporary reviews. In his early studies, such as his dissertation on the sociology of American pragmatism and *The New Men of Power*, Mills's amorphous ideological radicalism was tempered by the demands of social scientific inquiry, including those of conceptual delimitation and empirical precision, and these works were warmly received by Mills's academic colleagues. But as his ideological predilections began to color and even substitute for empirical evidence and conceptual clarity in *White Collar* and especially in *The Power Elite*, Mills met with increasing criticism. At first, he responded in his book, *The Sociological Imagination*, by delegitimating more modest, incremental attempts at expanding the range of sociological knowledge. Then, after a decade of impatience, he turned from social science to engage in ideological exhortation in *The Causes of World War Three* (1958), *Listen, Yankee* (1960), and "The New Left" (1960). By then his relationship to most of his academic colleagues was one of mutual suspicion, not to say contempt.

The incisive reviews of *White Collar* and *The Power Elite* by David Reisman, Talcott Parsons, and Daniel Bell provide some of the greatest displays of acuity. Critics of Mills's *White Collar* claimed that he attributed to the white-collar classes a degree of alienation which there was no empirical reason to believe his subjects actually felt. They pointed out that Mills failed to recognize the role of ethnic loyalties, religious beliefs, and familial commitments in providing

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modern Americans with a sense of deeper meaning not necessarily available to them in their work. Since Mills presumed the distribution of power in American society to be illegitimate, argued critics of *The Power Elite*, he failed to devote adequate attention to the values and beliefs which legitimate power and distinguish it from pure domination. All agreed that Mills's open but unargued presuppositions distorted his portrait of the nature of power, producing a caricature rather than a model.

Among the most intriguing aspects of Horowitz's study of Mills are the changing evaluations by the author of his subject. Various chapters appear to have been written at progressive stages of Horowitz's own intellectual development and reflect the shift from his early admiration for Mills to his later criticism, as he became less at ease with the ideological cast of Mills's work. When he began work on this biography two decades ago, Horowitz was more certain of Mills's importance. In his introduction to Mills's collected essays, which Horowitz edited in 1962, he termed Mills "the greatest sociologist the United States has ever produced." Today Horowitz has a good deal more difficulty persuading himself of the enduring value of Mills's work. At one point he avers that Mills's mature writings were characterized by "serious and profound criticism of the social system, accompanied by weak, even insipid alternative constructions to fill the void he helps us to understand." And after reviewing the contemporary criticisms of *The Power Elite*, which he regards as Mills's most important work, Horowitz concedes that the book "provided little in the way of theoretical innovation," lacked a coherent philosophy, and was influential above all for its populist sentiment of controlling elites and manipulated masses.

In the end, the most significant historical questions surrounding Mills may well be those with which Horowitz began his "Introduction to C. Wright Mills" two decades ago. "What was the 'magic' which C. Wright Mills possessed," he asked, and "Why did he become the singular intellectual 'hero' of our age?" Horowitz reinforces the suspicion that the gap between Mills's scientific achievement and his attractiveness to so many intellectuals (especially students) is the real "puzzle of C. Wright Mills." Latin American intellectuals and the American new left—still nascent at the time of Mills's death—particularly were attracted to Mills. Works such as *White Collar*, *The Power Elite*, and *The Sociological Imagination*, as well as what Horowitz calls the "causes" of C. Wright Mills—among them the quest for unilateral disarmament, the attack on "NATO in-

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tellectuals," the equivalence of the United States and the Soviet Union as imperfect democracies and "over-developed" societies, the "Third World" as the new locus of salvational hope—were to acquire a broad following in the decade after his death.

Those critics who knew Mills best suggested that in *White Collar* he had projected his own alienation onto the American middle classes. Horowitz's account of Mills's life leads to the suspicion that Mills failed to appreciate the ongoing significance of nonvocational ties because he himself was so free of them in his own life. It is tempting to conclude that when Mills wrote in *The Sociological Imagination* of "contemporary man's self-conscious view of himself as at least an outsider, if not a permanent stranger," he generalized from a very small and all-too-personal sample.

Some of the attraction of Mills certainly lay in his frequent reiteration of the link between "personal troubles" and "public issues," in his promise of social science as individual therapy. Not only does such a promise tend to attract the most estranged to social science, it engenders a search for total knowledge and quick fixes. The development of scientific knowledge depends on the ability to tolerate ignorance. But ideological predilection tends to substitute a consoling caricature for the complexity of the real world, and to denounce those satisfied to cultivate partial, objective, qualified knowledge as soulless plodders. It was this charge—and others like it—which Mills levelled at his colleagues, with some wit and perspicuity in *The Sociological Imagination*, and with venom in his later writings.

But what was the ideology of this ideologist? Though vague elements of socialism, populism, and an irrational faith in rational planning entered into it, the most consistent standard by which Mills judged and condemned labor leaders (in *The New Men of Power*), the new middle classes (in *White Collar*), the purportedly homogenous and manipulative (in *Power Elite*) and, ultimately, American and Soviet societies, was their failure to allow intellectuals sufficient access to power. It was the spectacle of Castro as the intellectual in power which finally captured his imagination and his critical faculties, as Trotsky, the prophet armed, had captured those of an earlier generation. In this too he was a harbinger of the decade to follow, "a premature anti-American" as Dwight Macdonald tagged him in historical retrospect.

JERRY Z. MULLER

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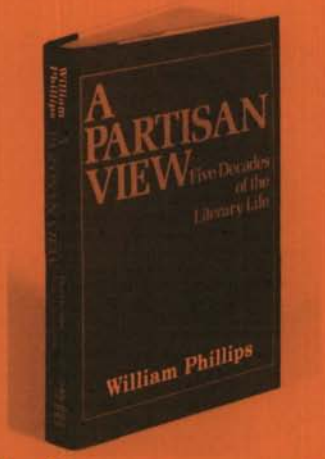

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